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Unsettling Geographies: Primitivist Utopias in Queer American Literature
from Walt Whitman to Willa Cather

by

Benjamin Michael Meiners

A dissertation presented to
The Graduate School
of Washington University in
partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy

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Benjamin Meiners

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Unsettling Geographies: Primitivist Utopias in Queer American Literature from Walt Whitman

to Willa Cather

by

Benjamin Meiners

Doctor of Philosophy in English and American Literature

Washington University in St. Louis, 2018

Professor Vivian R. Pollak, Chair

In “Unsettling Geographies: Primitivist Utopias in Queer American Literature from Walt Whitman to Willa Cather,” I argue that the colonial discourse of primitivism played a central role in the queer literary imaginaries of both canonical and non-canonical U.S. authors. Building on the work of historians of sexuality who trace the complex development of the twentieth-century homo-/hetero- binary, I show how literary works produced in this historical moment—roughly 1860 to 1925—explored and in some instances even advocated alternative queer modes of citizenship and erotic imagination and practice. Focusing on the works of Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, Charles Warren Stoddard, and Willa Cather, I demonstrate throughout that while those erotic alternatives have been posited as inherently politically radical in many feminist and queer theoretical traditions, the pervasive primitivization of indigenous bodies and lands in these literatures tells us a more complicated and troubling story about the co-implicated histories of non-heteronormativity and settler colonialism in the U.S. If much recent queer theory has explored the ways in which racial and sexual normativities derive from histories of settler colonialism, my dissertation contributes to this discussion by addressing how queer literary

representations of racial and national otherness both challenge those normative discourses and participate in ongoing colonial and imperial projects.

Introduction:
Primitive/Native/Queer

Ghost Dancing Backwards

Does an Indian
drag queen
mouth the words
to a woman's mourning song?
Does an Indian
drag queen
Ghost Dance backwards?

(Walking with Ghosts 17)

In the fourth stanza of his poem entitled "Ghost Dances," Qwo-Li Driskill, a Two-Spirit Cherokee poet, scholar, and activist, asks us to fundamentally re-orient the ways in which we interpret queer art and performance. What difference, s/he asks, does "Indianness" make to the performance and interpretation of queer artistic forms? By asking these questions, s/he instructs us to contextualize drag within the ongoing history of U.S. settler colonialism, pointing to the Ghost Dance as a historical moment and a religio-political movement that continues to this day. Implicitly, s/he places the queer psychoanalytic tradition, which emphasizes mourning, melancholia, negativity, and the death drive, within the necropolitical space of the settler state.¹ When an Indian drag queen mourns, Driskill suggests, she mourns a history of loss that transcends the loss of a lover, a gender ideal, or an object of desire.² Driskill entangles the loss of a lover within that history of deeper loss: the history of the genocide of indigenous peoples on land now called the United States. Furthermore, s/he suggests that the history of gender and

sexual nonnormativity itself—the history of which, for many, drag has come to signify—cannot be understood outside the context of settler colonialism. Such contextualization requires a different interpretive practice. Advancing such a practice, Driskill conjures the image of an Indian drag queen Ghost Dancing backwards, an image that simultaneously points us to the past and to the future, an image that imagines “backwardness” in motion. S/he also importantly points us to a specifically indigenous history of struggle and resistance, and a specific time and place, but one that continues to haunt the present: the Ghost Dance of 1890.

While the Ghost Dance religion/movement began around 1870 as a means of revitalizing Native traditions in the face of settler occupation, the Ghost Dance of 1890 is the most well known; it has come to symbolize the violent “completion” of the U.S. colonial project. Interpreted by the U.S. government as a native revolt, it ended violently when President Benjamin Harrison ordered the military to end their ceremonial tradition. This resulted in the massacre of over three hundred Lakota Indians in what came to be called the Massacre at Wounded Knee. In Qwo-Li Driskill’s poem, s/he suggests that the history of sexuality in the U.S. is entangled with and haunted by this massacre, a symbol of settler narratives of conquest but also native resistance and “survivance.”³ For historians of sexuality, the years leading up to 1890 as well as those that follow it, have become crucial; this was a moment, in Peter Coviello’s words, “before it was assumed every person and every intimacy could be assigned a hetero- or homosexuality, but in which the stirrings of that taxonomical division could already be felt in a number of quarters” (*Tomorrow’s Parties* 32). U.S. borderlands, I contend throughout this project, were particularly palpable sites for those stirrings as the “primitive”/“native” became the racialized figure of perversion.⁴ In *Unsettling Geographies*, I engage Driskill’s poetic rhetorical questions in and through the study of canonical U.S. literature produced around the time of the

Ghost Dance—roughly, 1860 to 1925—to examine the knotty relations between the discursive shifts of sexuality and literary works produced in this period of settler colonialism, when Frederick Jackson Turner announced triumphantly the “closing of the frontier.” I show that for the white-authored texts I study here, the figure of the “native,” imagined both racially and geographically, became a crucial site of desire and identification within those co-implicated discourses, representative figures of queer alternatives to sexual and national identity.⁵ Further, and most crucially, I argue that while the authors under investigation here imagined alternative forms of sexuality and sociality to the modern homo-/hetero- binary, these alternatives nonetheless depended upon the consolidation of “natives” to the primitive past and the desire to territorialize as-yet-“unsettled” space. Imagining an Edenic “native” space outside the official boundaries of the U.S. nation-state as the untrammelled wilderness of sexual possibility, these writers adopted the very racial and expansionist rhetoric that justified and scaffolded U.S. colonial and imperial interests.

I thus highlight the centrality of settler colonialism, indigenous peoples, and imagined geographies in the history of the complex, non-linear, but nonetheless pivotal and identifiable history of the emergence of the homo-/hetero- binary in the United States. Doing so necessarily illuminates historical trajectories that veer from literal applications of those posited in Michel Foucault’s influential account in *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, that Carl Westphal’s 1870 publication of *Archiv für Neurologie* marks the birthdate of “homosexuality”—in his famous words, when the “sodomite” morphed from “temporary aberration” into a “species” (43). Some critics and historians have challenged this date on a number of grounds, with some noting his Eurocentrism and others noting the limitations of his archive.⁶ Most significantly for our purposes, scholars have taken up the question of Foucault’s linear narrative of “emergence.” As

early as 1990, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* speculated about the utility of linear accounts of the history of sexuality, noting the problematic nature of the narrative of a "Great Paradigm Shift" and urging against "narratives of supersession" (44-8).⁷ More recently, Molly McGarry has challenged Foucault's thesis by emphasizing the cultural, geographical, and religious landscape of the nineteenth-century U.S. in the shaping of modern sexual subjectivity; furthermore, she demonstrates how attention to "untimely" sexualities complicates a conception of the history of sexuality as a linear one. Following McGarry, Peter Coviello's work has put the concept of "untimeliness" to productive use in theorizing the ways in which literary texts from the mid- to late-nineteenth-century U.S. resist historical methodologies that rely on such narratives. Plumbing canonical literary works produced during this period, he demonstrates how they imagine erotic futures that resist the legibility that binaristic identitarianism would seem to promise—futures that might not even register to us as "sex" at all. It is to his work, and other important studies of "queer time" and "queer historiography" that I am perhaps especially indebted.⁸ However, *Unsettling Geographies* sets out to demonstrate the ways in which "untimeliness"—the queer, alternative temporalities imagined by white literary figures writing during the crystallization of sexuality-as-identity and resisting that crystallization—pervasively maps itself onto the figure of the "native," the racialized discourse of "nativism," and the geographic desire for imperial expansion in these literatures.

From the mid-nineteenth to the early-twentieth-century U.S., as the homo-/hetero- binary mutated from scientific theory into accepted "truth," the literary figures I engage in this dissertation and the works they produced imagined alternative visions of erotic life that resisted sexual identification even as they reveled in queer pleasures and non-normative modes of sociality. I examine a pervasive trend in these alternative visions, one that might seem to be at

odds with this sexual exploration: the co-constitutive discourses of colonialism and primitivism. These discourses, I argue, highlight the importance of space to the study of temporality, as well as the centrality of race to the study of sexuality.⁹ Through languages of affiliation, identification, and eroticization, the white-authored texts that I investigate focalize the figure of the “native” as the central representative of an erotic “elsewhere.” That elsewhere is sometimes imagined in the past, at other times in the future, but always outside the U.S. national geography. I show that, in their desires for racial and geographical crossing, these authors adopt the language of U.S. expansion, in turn naturalizing the displacement and even the genocide of indigenous peoples. Finally, I set out to demonstrate how recent gay, lesbian, feminist, and queer criticism of these works, by eliding this pervasive and crucial problematic, perpetuates this naturalizing tendency. I thus draw on recent interventions in queer of color critique, queer native studies, and postcolonial queer criticism, to re-read white-authored canonical queer texts as implicated in—rather than inherently critical of—discourses of U.S. settler colonialism.¹⁰

In *Unsettling Geographies*, I focus on four U.S. authors who have been canonized under the auspices of U.S. literary studies and queer studies: Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, Charles Warren Stoddard, and Willa Cather. Organized in a loosely chronological fashion, each chapter focuses on a specific U.S. borderland in order to highlight the significance of the social construction of space in the development of twentieth-century discourses of gender, race, and sexuality.¹¹ It begins on the “frontier” with Whitman, and then moves to the U.S.-Latin American border in Emily Dickinson’s poetry. In Chapter Three, I turn to the U.S. occupation of the “South Seas” in the peculiar, largely ignored oeuvre of Charles Warren Stoddard. Finally, I return to the “frontier” of Willa Cather’s novels, imagined as a nineteenth-century past for which her protagonists romantically and erotically ache. I focus on these figures for reasons having to do

with their historical positioning and their canonicity. Each of these writers lived and wrote in the decades in which the discursive shift I described above occurred; each implicitly or explicitly resisted identitarian models of sexuality (heterosexual, homosexual, or otherwise) in their work or their correspondence; each have been taken up as model forebears in gay and lesbian studies; and, with the exception of Stoddard, each maintains a large body of study in queer literary studies.

The “emergence” of the homo-/hetero- binary occurred roughly around the same time as the “emergence” of the modern nation-state as well as the “closing” of the “frontier.” As Scott Lauria Morgenson writes, “The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw institutions and discourses of modern sexuality proliferate along with the ‘closure’ of the frontier as a central feature of national consciousness in a white settler society” (42). Relatedly, the biologization of a highly racialized ideal of national citizenship produced new ways of conceiving “nativeness” and “foreignness” as the nation’s past and its racial “other.”¹² Through readings of canonical queer texts produced at this crucial historical moment, this dissertation shows how the queer “untimeliness” that Coviello theorizes and imaginatively traces in these works often relies upon the racist imagination of the “native” body and the desire to expand into “native” space. I therefore broaden queer theory’s investment in temporality into the realms of geography, race, and biopolitics (about which I will have more to say below). Even as these canonical literary figures imagine the destabilization of emerging gender and sexual normativities, they do so in and through discourses of racial otherness; in turn, they consign non-whiteness to impossible citizenship, impossible modern-ness, and impossible present-ness.

This trend can be more clearly understood when we contextualize these works within U.S. discourses of nativism. Beginning with the publication of Whitman’s third edition of *Leaves*

of *Grass* and ending with the release of Willa Cather's *The Professor's House*, I trace the time period of 1860 to 1925, a crucial moment in which competing nativist sentiments in the U.S. joined and were influenced by the overlapping discourses of racial biological determinism, sexual deviance, national identity, and the shift from colonialism to imperialism. This is the same time period on which historian John Higham focuses in his landmark, authoritative study, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism* (1955). By situating my dissertation within these dates, I suggest that the solidification of the homo-/hetero- binary should be understood within the context of American nativism, a diverse, multivalent set of political/social movements in this time period in which biological determinations of U.S. citizenship—like “race” and “blood”—began to congeal. While scholars working at the intersection of queer studies and critical race theory in the U.S. have demonstrated the ways in which normative sexual discourses have developed out of the racial discourses of slavery and reconstruction, histories and theories of the role of the related projects of settler colonialism and nativism have, until very recently, received less attention. Drawing this connection not only shifts how we understand the various movements of “nativism” in this time period (emphasizing how those racial logics required heteronormative discourses including the pathologization of “perverts” who could not or would not reproduce the racial/familial “line”), but also how we understand the history of sexuality in the U.S.; it is, I contend throughout, inextricable from those movements. Higham defines nativism as “intense opposition to an internal minority on the ground of its foreign (i.e., ‘un-American’) connections” (4). He notes that while “nativistic antagonisms may, and do, vary widely in response to the changing character of minority irritants and the shifting conditions of the day[,]...through each separate hostility runs the connecting, energizing force of modern nationalism” (4). Increasingly in the late nineteenth century, especially after the post-

Civil War emancipation of enslaved peoples, those antagonisms took the form of biologically deterministic notions of race and racial hierarchy, solidifying the boundaries of Anglo-Saxonism, normalcy, and inclusion in the national citizenry on one side and non-whiteness, deviance, and exclusion on the other. It was partly through nativist movements that the scientific “truth” of race would come to be understood as “naturally” related to questions of national belonging, sexual reproduction and non-reproduction, and the spatial borders of the national population.

Unfortunately, Higham has little to say about how indigenous peoples fared within and without U.S. nativisms. Writing about the last phase of nativism addressed in this dissertation (though this might be applied to earlier movements as well), Walter Benn Michaels notes “the Indian’s” paradoxical position as a primitive “ur-American,” or “original American.”¹³ Designated as such, indigenous peoples were considered quintessentially American, privy to a pure (note the eugenicist language) “Americanness” to which many nativists longed to return in the twentieth-century. That purity, positioned in an archaic and unattainable past, was thus imagined as extinct and by extension non-reproductive. In this way, we can understand indigenous peoples as “queered”: delegated as always already outside the reproductive population of the nation.

The Literature of Primitivism

Much of the most influential work on primitivism—that is, work that analyzes its discourses in the vein of cultural critique—has tended to historicize it as the yin to twentieth-century modernism’s yang. The term has a much longer history of shifting meanings, as Marianna Torgovnik has shown, but it was in the twentieth century, she argues, that it came to signify terms like “savage, pre-Columbian, tribal, third world, underdeveloped, developing,

archaic, traditional, exotic, ‘the anthropological record,’ non-Western, and Other” (21). Perhaps primitivism’s most widely cited critic, Torgovnik calls it “a modern and postmodern obsession...a bedrock or gut issue,” as well as a “cliché, part of the ambiance and aura of our culture” (21). Sieglinde Lemke’s *Primitivist Modernism* (1998), on the other hand, deploys “primitivism” ironically, arguing that “‘blackness’ helped to create the ‘white’ aesthetic that we today refer to as modernism” and forged an American identity that is “necessarily new, is neither purely black nor purely white, and is (metaphorically) the defining aspect of modernism” (9). Lemke’s study is invested in shaking up the West/rest binary Torgovnik takes to be the crux of primitivist discourse but nonetheless maintains its uniquely “modernist” bent.¹⁴

I wish to chart a longer history of primitivism, though I do not suggest that primitivist discourse emerges out of a single identifiable period. I argue that an indicatively *queer* primitivism, situated in the U.S. and related to the overlapping discourses of sexuality and settler colonialism, begins before an identifiable “modernism” during the mid- to late-nineteenth century, though this is not to suggest a teleological relation, but merely a longer chronology. Primitivism has played a foundational role in American myth-making, and as Torgovnik suggests, its deployment tells us far more about the U.S. as a settler state, and the queer authors who engage it, than it does about indigenous peoples. But the queer paths primitivism has taken in American letters have remained under-examined. Briefly, I will turn to some of the most powerful myth-making texts produced around the turn of the twentieth century in order to highlight primitivism’s cultural power and pervasiveness at this moment, as well as to show its more conventional ideological utility. In so doing, I hope to provide a frame from which we can understand how queer literary figures repurposed the term.

Three years after the Ghost Dance, in 1893 at the Chicago World's Fair, Frederick Jackson Turner delivered his famous paper, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," to the American Historical Association. Drawing on biologicistic Darwinian evolutionary theory, the history Turner tells is a triumphant tale in which "civilization's" encounter with the "west" not only gave America its unique character of "rugged" individualism (15); it is the very reason the U.S. rose to prominence on the global stage as a powerful imperial force. Turner's history is implicitly a history of racialization. The meeting of "white" and "Indian" meant that both "whiteness" and "Indianness" accrued their "opposite" but related significance; out of this relation "American culture" was born; and while "American culture" as Turner defines it is implicitly "white," it is nonetheless a whiteness inflected with the experience of that crucial meeting point. For years, the "frontier thesis," as it has come to be called, transcended the discipline of history and remained one of the most influential accounts of American culture, including in American literary studies, even since the transnational turn in U.S. literary studies.¹⁵ For Turner and his acolytes, the "frontier," and the "completion" of this teleological narrative of travel from East to West, *made* the "national character," gave it shape and a cohesive body. Turner understood the space of the nation in biological terms—as a reproductive population—emphasizing again and again a "germ theory of politics" (2). Even as the meeting of native and white was reproductive of the white population, it meant the "inevitable" decline and death of native peoples. In this history, natives are the population expendable—and yet utterly necessary—for the reproduction of the nation's "novel" character. In other words, the nation extracts and expels the native.

Turner was not alone in linking the primitive to the desire for an emergent, unique American culture. In 1900, George Santayana published an essay called "The Poetry of

Barbarism” in his book, *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*, in which he identified a primitive poetics at the heart of American letters. An ambivalent critique of modern literature, the essay posits a history not of the development but the deterioration of poetry in the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century U.S. Santayana laments that despite the advantages of the “progress” of civilization, modern poetry “has relapsed into miscellaneous and shallow exuberance” (106). “They [modern poets] have,” he writes, “...the new and marvellous conception which natural science has given us of the world and of the conditions of human progress”; yet modern poetry rejects such progress in search of the pleasures of the senses (104). In his diatribe against that “shallow,” superficial, all-inclusive welcoming of the sensual, Santayana categorizes this propensity as “barbarism,” a term that carries racial, geographical, and historical meanings. Barbarism is civilization’s racial other; barbarism is civilization’s geographical “outside”; barbarism is civilization’s past. It is Walt Whitman, whose works I explore in Chapter One and who in some ways functions as a central figure in the queer primitivisms I investigate throughout, that Santayana considers the representative of this trend.¹⁶ As Santayana would have it, if civilization has progressed, modern U.S. literature has stubbornly, queerly, remained attached to a barbarian past—a past in which the pleasures of the senses are attributed more importance than “the power of idealisation” (103). However, Whitman’s—and those other “barbarians”—poetry is not without value: “it can, by virtue of its red-hot irrationality, utter wilder cries, surrender itself and us to more absolute passion...” (107). He admits, “Irrational stimulation may tire us in the end, but it excites us in the beginning; and how many conventional poets, tender and prolix, have there not been, who tire us now without ever having excited anybody?” (107). What is lamentable about “barbaristic” poetry is also that which gives Santayana readerly pleasure rendered in highly physical terms, linking reading with erotics much

the same way Whitman often does. Invoking “red-hot irrationality,” wild “cries,” “absolute passion,” “stimulation,” excitement, then finally a sense of tiredness, we see Santayana momentarily assenting to the erotic potential of Whitmanian verse, because of and not despite its “primitive” qualities.

Early influential works of Americanist literary and cultural criticism—works that have been foundational in the study of American literary studies as a discipline—followed these early-twentieth-century models. Setting out to define the distinctive character of American literature and culture, many of these works, despite their important differences, nonetheless agree on a central theme: the meeting-point of “civilization” and “savagery” rendered in sexual terms. Henry Nash Smith’s 1950 *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and as Myth*, “traces the impact of the West, the vacant [sic] continent beyond the frontier, on the consciousness of Americans”; in so doing, he charts the trope of “virgin land,” land cast as female and as endlessly available for “Americans” masculine conquest (4). A crucial element in the project of Manifest Destiny, he contends along with Turner, was its dependence on “the increase of population resulting from agricultural expansion into an empty, fertile continent” (12). Like Turner, he assumes that the meeting-place of “civilization” and the “West” engenders the increase of an indicatively *Anglo-European* population.¹⁷ R.W.B. Lewis’s 1959 *The American Adam* traces the pervasive, quasi-secularized figure of “Adam” in nineteenth-century American literature, “the authentic American as a figure of heroic innocence and vast possibilities, poised at the start of a new history”—a new history conflated with a new population, implied by the biblical story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (1). Whitman, it is worth noting, plays a central role in both of these works, though the queer elements of Whitman’s Adamic expansionism go un-discussed. He remains relatively absent in Leslie Fiedler’s still-controversial

1960 *Love and Death in the American Novel* that brought, however problematically, questions of homoeroticism and interracial intimacy to the major themes that he argued pervaded American letters. His overarching thesis posited that at the heart of all great American literature lies the mythical archetype in which “a white and a colored American male flee from civilization into each other’s arms” (12). Underlying this thesis was the assumption that this trope indicated a pervasive failure or refusal for American authors (all white men) to “mature” into “adult” (read: heterosexual) sexuality. In other words, Fiedler linked non-whiteness and homosexuality as “primitive” states that were intimately intertwined. While homophobic and racist assumptions undergird Fiedler’s provocations (and indeed, to gloss Torgovnik, while those assumptions tell us more about Fiedler than they do about, say, Huckleberry Finn and Jim), they point precisely to a connection I am interested in throughout this dissertation: the belief that queerness and non-whiteness signal the failure to mature, the failure to develop proper racialized heterosexual citizenship. Through my analyses of literary figures long preceding Fiedler but contemporary to the authors he surveys, I reveal how this discourse was already present before Freudian theories of child development (on which Fiedler’s thesis is based), and how it was *utilized* by white queer authors rather than buried in their unconscious to be discovered by the intrepid critic who dares to “go there.”

The Biopolitics of Primitivism

One way to understand the works I have surveyed above as related (across fields, across time, and across geography) is through Foucault’s concept of “discourse.”¹⁸ But another way to understanding their intertwinements is to think about discourse in relation to another, later Foucauldian concept: biopolitics. *Unsettling Geographies* merges two seemingly distinct

methods: theories of biopolitics and the textual analysis of literary works produced in the U.S. across the mid-nineteenth century and extending into the early twentieth. Much like the concept “queer,” “biopolitics” remains difficult to define—and even seems to resist definition. Arguably first theorized by Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, in an essay entitled “Right of Death and Power Over Life,” the term intends to describe the ways in which, since the seventeenth century, a fundamental shift in the operations of “power” took place: from sovereignty (“the right [of the sovereign] to *take* life or *let* live”) to biopower (“power...situated and exercised at the level of life, the species, the race, and the large-scale phenomena of population”) (42-3). But as Timothy Campbell and Adam Sitze note, there is no “coherent concept of biopolitics that can be extracted intact from *La volonté de savoir*” (6). And so a large body of work has been produced in the last forty-plus years since *The History of Sexuality*’s publication, extrapolating, nuancing, and critiquing Foucault’s theory. One of his more prominent re-interpreters has been Giorgio Agamben, who argues that modern nation-states are not only invested in life but, in certain historical-political conditions, continue to exercise their power to exceed the legal mandate not to kill.¹⁹ Achille Mbembe charges Agamben with not going far enough, arguing that colonial states are in fact, in some cases, invested in a larger, more pervasive “necropolitics.” Analyzing the affective dimensions of neoliberalism in our current moment, Lauren Berlant theorizes the biopolitical conditions of “slow death,” which “refers to the physical wearing out of a population in a way that points to its deterioration as a defining condition of its experience and historical existence” (*Cruel Optimism* 95). Agamben, Mbembe, and Berlant (among others) thus compel us to think about the uneven distribution of life and death, an important distinction that involves a more multivalent, intersectional analysis in the historicization of “sexuality.”²⁰ While I do not dogmatically subscribe to one model of

biopolitics over others, I do invoke these theories when applicable (albeit in a historicized mode) in my consideration of literary representations of native peoples.

In recent years, queer theorists whose work is informed by Foucault's and others' theories of biopolitics have used them to investigate the ways in which some queer subjects in the U.S. since at least the late 1990s have been enfolded into—and in many ways have been complicit with—nationalist, neoliberal, and imperial projects. In a perhaps surprising historical turn of events, a fraught and highly exclusionary “embrace” of certain forms of queer life and intimacy (namely under the auspices of the economic and reproductive unit of the nuclear family) has resulted in what Jasbir Puar has called “U.S. sexual exceptionalism.” In *Terrorist Assemblages* (2007), Puar argues that issues of “border security” and national citizenship are entangled with a relatively recent embrace of (some) queer identities in nationalistic efforts to place the U.S. as the acme of modernity in contrast to “backwards” national and racial “others”—in her work, the figure of the Muslim “terrorist” in the post-9/11 U.S. (and more recently Palestinian bodies in the Israeli state). It is through biopolitics that Puar shifts the theoretical utility of “queer” away from the deconstruction of or resistance to sexual identities and norms and toward an attention to the ways in which populations become “queered”: figures of non-reproduction and death, figures of *primitive backwardness*.

A host of other important works in queer studies has taken up similar themes: Lisa Duggan's *The Twilight of Equality?* (2000) examines the phenomenon of an emergent “homonormativity” in the late-twentieth-century U.S.; David Eng theorizes our current political moment in terms of “queer liberalism” (*Feeling of Kinship*, 2010); and Chandan Reddy argues that the modern U.S. nation-state's promise of “freedom” (including the “sexual freedom” supposedly granted through the legalization of gay marriage) through liberal citizenship in fact

expands the state's power to exert further violence against "expendable" populations (*Freedom With Violence*, 2011). These works are historically, geographically, and politically situated in the neoliberal present in the U.S., wherein some queer subjects—primarily white, male, cisgender, able-bodied, urban, middle- to upper-class—have achieved the status of (re)productive citizenship within liberal U.S. economic structures and political discourses. Each of these works has called attention to the ways in which subjects over time might be enfolded into "life," at the cost of those subjects rendered "undesirable" or indeed disposable to those projects. And each of these works is interested in the tension between the different theoretical and political utilities and contradictions of "queerness." In this dissertation, I am also interested in this tension, a tension that—as the above mentioned theorists' work shows—an attention to biopolitics makes especially clear. On one hand, Whitman, Dickinson, Stoddard, and Cather offer alternatives to, or even resist identitarian notions of sexuality; in this way, they may be considered representative "queer" figures. On the other hand, they participate in ideologies and logics that "queer" indigenous peoples, and though their very identification, affiliation, eroticization, or fetishization, mark them as figures of death and decline.

Of course, my study is one of the nineteenth-century U.S. and not the U.S. after the turn of the twenty-first century. Thus, my method is not simply the "application" of biopolitical theory onto the past. I attempt throughout the chapters that follow to historicize these texts, while keeping in mind queer theory's incisive critiques of rigid historicization, critiques mounted primarily within queer literary studies. If the biopolitical turn is in full swing with *contemporary* queer cultural criticism, the field of nineteenth-century American literary studies has been slower to take up this theoretical approach. Though there exist a handful of exceptions—perhaps most notably Dana Luciano's 2007 *Arranging Grief*—theories of biopolitics and nineteenth-century

American literary studies require a more thoroughgoing conversation.²¹ Luciano's work has put the close reading of nineteenth-century literary texts to use in making queer theorists attentive to what she calls "chronobiopolitics": "the sexual arrangement of the time of life" at the level of state populations (9). My dissertation centralizes the significance of the biopolitics of *geography* in the vexed period around the turn of the twentieth century. If chronobiopolitics normativizes and linearizes the body's—and in turn the population's—relationship to time, I point toward the ways in which the supposedly abstract territorialization of space that imagined geographies enact also has a biopolitical dimension.

Campbell and Sitze suggest that the richness of Foucault's theorization of biopolitics in *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1* as an analytical impetus is not in "affirming, rejecting, or applying" the term but in "understanding precisely its *turbulence*" (7). In that spirit, I engage concepts that have held a certain significance in this field of study, concepts like reproduction, sovereignty, population, territory, and so on. My goal, though, is not to read literary texts to confirm these theoretical paradigms; instead, I am interested in the ways in which the authors in my study explicitly deploy these concepts in ways that evocatively connect questions of sexuality, race, space, and the politics of life and death in the settler colonial state of the U.S. Furthermore, I do not attempt to mount critiques of whole bodies of diverse theories of biopolitics, but instead demonstrate the ways in which biopolitics might be seen in new lights through the close analysis of literary texts.

Perverse Presentism and Queer Settler Colonialism

The queer futures offered by Whitman, Dickinson, Stoddard, and Cather, authors who have been readily taken up in queer nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century literary scholarship, often rely upon the logics of what Scott Lauria Morgensen has productively

identified as “queer settler colonialism.” “Settler colonialism,” Morgenson explains, “is naturalized whenever conquest or displacement of Native peoples is ignored or appears necessary or complete, and whenever subjects are defined by settler desires to possess Native land, history, or culture” (16). “Queer settler colonialism,” therefore, occurs when non-native queer communities uncritically appropriate native iconography and/or “resolve their exile through land-based relationships to disappeared Native people” (6). (Particularly vivid examples of this phenomenon, analyzed so provocatively by Morgenson as well as Elizabeth Povinelli, are the rural retreats of Radical Faerie communities.)²² I draw on this work to suggest that, while none of the authors I discuss understood themselves as part of a “queer community,” the modes of erotic belonging they imagine relate to space in such a way that they oftentimes exhibit these logics. In this way, my work aligns with Mark Rifkin’s 2014 *Settler Common Sense*, which examines the works of Hawthorne, Thoreau, and Melville in order to demonstrate this phenomenon in canonical nineteenth-century texts; however, whereas Rifkin at times seems to naturalize the relationship between “queerness” and “antistatistism”—this is queerness in a negative, Edelmanian mode—I show how queer desires might be in tension with or wish to escape from the normative discourses of colonialism while at the same time complying with and naturalizing the settler occupation of land in the U.S.

While *Unsettling Geographies* is interested in shifting sexual definitions over time, I am less concerned with tracking them systematically, scientifically, taxonomically, or definitionally; my method is not historical in the tradition of new historicism in literary studies. Sharon Marcus argues rightly that “[the] history of sexuality has depended disproportionately on trial records and medical sources that foregrounded pathology and deviance” (13).²³ In the wake of Foucault, many literary historians of sexuality have tended to “situate” texts based on the dating of these

kinds of sources; such a methodology risks rehearsing what Eve Sedgwick has aptly called a “narrative of supersession” of one sexual model to the next across time. Christopher Looby, not totally abandoning the import of “chronology,” argues that “the literary archive offers a *better* ground for the history of sexuality” and that “sexuality is essentially a literary phenomenon”; he writes that “people would never have had sexuality (never mind any particular sexuality) if novelists and others hadn’t invented it (and them)” (842, 841, emphasis mine). While I do not wish to announce one archive “better” than any other, or simply enact a complete reversal of over-determined “significance,” I do want to take Marcus’s and Looby’s provocations into a field of study that is foundational for the chapters to come: works in queer of color critique that analyze the racial underpinnings of sexual pathologization and deviance. In these works, as well as in histories of biopolitics for that matter, “discourse” tends to be explored primarily through the archival pathways of medical and legal records. In *Queering the Color Line* (2000), for example, Siobhan Somerville introduces her thesis—that “the formation of notions of heterosexuality and homosexuality emerged in the United States through (and not merely parallel to) a discourse saturated with assumptions about the racialization of bodies”—through readings of the Wilde trials, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, and Havelock Ellis’s sexological text *Sexual Inversion*, before moving into her analyses of fiction and cinema (4). More recently, in *Against the Closet* (2012), Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman similarly traces the ways in which blackness came to signify pathology and perversity in the sexual sciences from the late nineteenth century through the twentieth—from Freud to Ellis, from Moynihan to Stember. Abdur-Rahman demonstrates how beliefs about the physical, visual differences between black and white bodies provided “proof” of black sexual deviance to these scientists and thinkers. I have unmistakably benefitted greatly from Abdur-Rahman and Somerville’s analyses of these archives. While “primitivism” is not the

driving focus of their argument, they provide a good amount of evidence of the term's pervasive deployment in the racial and sexual sciences. However, my historical method is primarily a literary one. I supplement this important, ongoing work by focusing on the figure of the "native" in mid-nineteenth- to early-twentieth-century literary texts, demonstrating how a racial consciousness pervades imaginings of sexual alterity where "race" has heretofore seemed barely visible if not entirely absent.

Guiding that analysis are several methodological assumptions. First, by emphasizing close reading as a methodology, I neither wish to disconnect the text from history, nor from theory, nor from cultural and material conditions in which they were produced. Rather, it is my contention that close reading is a way of practicing history, theory, and cultural criticism by what Jack Halberstam calls "perverse presentism," which I argue is an apt reading practice for the study of queer settler colonialism in the past. In *Female Masculinity*, Halberstam advocates "a perversely presentist model of historical analysis, a model...that avoids the trap of simply projecting contemporary understandings back in time, but one that can apply insights from the present to the conundrums of the past" (53). This is precisely what I meant to do by invoking Puar, Duggan, Eng, and Reddy in my earlier discussion of contemporary biopolitics. Rather than project current political formations onto the nineteenth-century past, I am guided by these studies toward thinking about the ways in which queerness—even that which resists identitarianism, patriotism, and national citizenship—might be folded into nationalist, imperialist projects. Still, even as historical differences need to be taken into account, the U.S. continues to operate as a settler colonial state, even if these operations have been naturalized for and often seem invisible to non-Native peoples. It is that naturalization and seeming invisibility in queer nineteenth-century literary studies that this project hopes to interrogate.

My use of the term “queer,” it is worth mentioning, varies throughout this dissertation, though relations to space and place scaffold many of these uses. One of my favorite definitions is Eve Sedgwick’s in “Queer and Now”: “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or *can’t be* made) to signify monolithically” (*Tendencies* 8). I like this definition because even as it is resolutely anti-identitarian, it does not exclude the *negotiation* of identity wholesale, as in Lee Edelman’s *No Future*, which famously proclaims that “queerness can never define an identity; it can only ever disturb one” (17). Critiques of Edelman’s thesis aside (and there are plenty, as will be evident throughout the chapters that follow), he has nonetheless initiated a significant shift in queer studies: a non-identitarian attention to the interrelated fields of affect (his are steadfastly in the registers of “the negative”) and temporality (his is a refusal of futurity, which he argues is always implicated in hetero-reproductive ideology).

That initiation has been phenomenally generative in queer studies (though Edelman would likely bristle at the reproductive suggestions of that description). As I mentioned earlier, attention to the ways in which “time” normativizes bodies in the service of capitalist productivity and heteronormative life scripts has pushed the field in exciting directions. One such direction is an interrogation of the relationship between queerness and historical method. This recent work on temporality has been put to extraordinary use in queer nineteenth-century U.S. literary studies with Peter Coviello’s recent examination of “queer futures that never came to be” in the late nineteenth century, *Tomorrow’s Parties: Sex and the Untimely in Nineteenth-Century America* (2013), which I briefly described at the beginning of this introduction. If Coviello looks to nineteenth-century American authors writing before the codification of sexual identities, I build

upon his work to think about how borderlands compel not erotic futures tied to a community defined by “Americanness” but indeed desires to *transcend* national space and belonging. For the authors in this study, their queer relations to the spaces they imagine and the places they traverse compel their desires for alternative, non-national futures.

Contra Edelman, and following the lead of several queer, particularly queer of color critics, this dissertation dispels the myth of “the queer” as a necessarily radical figure or position. In fact, it posits that the fetishization of the “non-positionality” of queerness may be implicated in and reinforce the very idea of the social its proponents attempt to shield it from.²⁴ What I *do* glean from the so-called “negative turn” or “anti-social thesis” is an impetus to examine “queer history” in its uglier registers. In this regard, Heather Love’s *Feeling Backward* (2007) and especially Jack Halberstam’s essay, “The Killer in Me is the Killer in You: Homosexuality and Fascism” in *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011) have been especially instructive. In that latter work, Halberstam proposes “a model of queer history that is less committed to finding heroic models from the past and more resigned to the contradictory and complicit narratives that, in the past as in the present, connect sexuality to politics” (148). Glossing Leo Bersani, Halberstam suggests, “the erotic is an equal opportunity archive; it borrows just as easily, possibly more easily from politically problematic imagery than from politically palatable material” (149).

If we disentangle “the queer” from an already settled notion of “the good” or “the radical,” I ask, what kinds of histories emerge? How might this re-frame what has come to be called “queer literature?” Heather Love, for one, proposes a theory of “backward modernism” (*Feeling Backward* 7). “If modernization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century aimed to move humanity forward,” she writes, “it did so in part by perfecting techniques for mapping and disciplining subjects considered to be lagging behind—and so seriously compromised the

ability of these others ever to catch up. Not only the sexual and gender deviants but also women, colonized people, the nonwhite, the disabled, the poor, and criminals were marked as inferior by means of the allegation of backwardness” (6). While Love does not deploy the vocabulary of biopolitics, the phenomenon she describes here is precisely that. “Backwardness” signals deviants’ deviation from progress and productivity *as well as* a means of cross-identification; but it also signals, for *critics*, the non-recuperative, irredeemable ways by which white queer authors signal their own “backwardness” through the temporal past-ness of bodies and places racialized as “native” or “foreign.”

If queer studies, following Foucault, has criticized gay and lesbian studies for having looked to the past for our pathbreaking forebears on the road to our more liberating present, it may be argued that a kind of reversal has occurred: queer studies—in its nineteenth-centuryist modes anyway—has begun to look to the past for alternatives to present-day, identitarian LGBT rights discourse and its limited aspirations—what José Muñoz calls “gay pragmatism” (*Cruising Utopia* 19). It sees the political and erotic potential of interpreting the nineteenth century in “the making of a broader, richer, stranger queer world” (Coviello, *Tomorrow’s Parties* 206). I do not abandon that project nor that impulse. Still, I am committed to interrogating the ways in which the often-unmarked whiteness of queer inquiry can function to myopically attend to radical non-normativity and ignore, for example, the colonialist land claims that non-normativity depends upon.

I focus on canonical figures because I approach the literary canon as a particularly rich site in which the (bio)politics of “past” and “present” converge, discursive formations that allow a genealogical understanding of contemporary queer settler colonialisms. I pay close attention to the history of canonical authors’ reception in queer, feminist, and gay and lesbian studies to

show the theoretical, political, aesthetic “effects” of these works: how Whitman, Dickinson, Stoddard, and Cather continue to preoccupy queer literary studies and how, in turn, queer literary studies takes for granted the ways in which often liberatory models of queerness in these texts depend upon the logics of queer settler colonialism. Each—with the exception of Stoddard—has an exhaustive body of criticism in its wake. This was important to the formulation of this project, because I am interested as much in their literary and political legacy as their own historical moment.

Still, such a project has some necessary limitations. With the exception of my engagement with the poetry of Qwo-Li Driskill above, I do not investigate literature produced by indigenous peoples. While, since the 1990s, a great deal of post-colonial literary studies has shifted its focus from European and Anglo-American literature toward the cultures and literary productions of historically colonized peoples, I focus on white-authored texts. And while I acknowledge “the limitations of identifying colonial structures of power and knowledge without providing alternative frames of reference,” I nonetheless do so because, in nineteenth-century U.S. literary studies at least, “queer” as a referent, a methodology, and a politics continues to be linked to a radical politics of anti-statism and anti-colonialism in ways that obscure their various and frequent co-implications (Sharpe 181). Edward Said’s work in *Orientalism* (1978), *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), and elsewhere, has been crucial for my analysis despite its having been accused of adherence “to a colonial epistemology inasmuch as it failed to address native disruptions and restructurings of Eurocentric discourses” (Sharpe 186). By framing my dissertation with a queer native poet I hope to underscore the importance of native voices in queer methodologies; however, the bulk of my dissertation nonetheless remains beholden to colonial epistemologies. Analyzing colonial discourses remains a vital critical project, because

settler colonialism remains a naturalized, sometimes seemingly invisible, force that structures everyday life in the contemporary U.S.—including in the academy, and including in queer theory.

The other crucial limitation is that I do not address slavery and discourses of blackness in the racialization of sexuality in literary works produced during this period. In a larger version of this study, I would address the crucial theorizations of borders and embodiment in the work produced by Pauline Hopkins around this time, but in the interest of argumentative clarity, I have focused on white representations of “primitive” native lands and bodies. In addition, the analysis of the primitivization of black bodies and its relationship to queer sexuality has already been performed by a number of scholars, including Valerie Rohy, Robin Hackett, and others.²⁵ By focusing on the sexual primitivization of “natives,” I hope to extend and enrich this developing line of inquiry that has primarily taken place in black queer studies.

Chapter Overview

For my first chapter, I analyze the erotic poetry of Walt Whitman—specifically the “Calamus” and “*Enfans d’Adam*” sequences in the third edition of *Leaves of Grass*. Gay, feminist, and queer critics have long mined these texts in order to historicize and theorize the intimate entanglement of sexuality and politics in the nineteenth-century U.S. These critics have tended to focus on Whitman’s “homosexuality” or “queerness” and its link to his hopeful, forward-looking vision of an ideal democratic U.S. But I argue that this focus has obscured a crucial element to Whitman’s “queer” vision: U.S. national expansion—in an indicatively nativist register—and the colonization of indigenous peoples. While some critics have discussed Whitman’s imperialist and expansionist politics, the crucial *erotic* component of those politics has remained under-examined. I thus analyze the forward-looking and indicatively queer forms

of reproduction in Whitman's "Calamus" and "*Enfans d'Adam*" sequences. While I attend to Whitman's explicit gestures toward national and self expansion in these poems, I focus on their more quotidian moments of intimate belonging, thinking through the ways in which the erotics of Whitman's "I"—expansive, limitless, ever-fluid—imaginatively depends upon the logics of settler colonialism. Rather than concentrate on poems that explicitly celebrate U.S.

expansionism, I focus on Whitman's erotic poetry because it reveals the expansionist *logics* of certain "queer" forms of intimacy. While Whitman's poetry often disrupts the "heteronormative," biopolitical imperatives of the U.S. nation-state, that disruption nonetheless depends upon an imperialist, expansionist vision. Thus, this chapter seeks an approach to Whitman's sexual-political poetics that does not elide but indeed interrogates the logics of the displacement of indigenous peoples in Whitman's purportedly radical and democratic future. It also seeks to demonstrate the limits and the possible violence that a queer politics sutured to U.S. nationalism might entail.

My second chapter moves to a different mid-century "frontier" in the poetry of a supposedly staunch New Englander. Analyzing a number of Emily Dickinson's romantic letter-poems to her sister-in-law, Susan Gilbert, I ask how and why she deploys metaphors and other references to Latin America. I argue that Emily Dickinson conceives of the geographical border of the U.S. and Latin America in tandem with her desires for queer forms of belonging and intimacy untethered to the U.S. nation-state proper. In these Latin American landscapes, Dickinson imagines an exotic space where (1) she and Susan can enjoy each other's erotic companionship; and (2) they are allowed the status of mutually sovereign queens and conquistadores, not merely the status of democratic citizens. These personae are both sovereign and foreign: sovereign because Dickinson positions herself and Susan as rulers rather than

subjects or even citizen-subjects, and foreign because the self-sovereignty she imagines is withheld from her in the U.S. domestic sphere. These letter-poems speak to Dickinson's broad concerns about U.S. discourses of domesticity, which both justified imperial expansion and denied (white, middle-class) women political sovereignty. Ultimately, this paper shows how Dickinson's longing for an erotic and political "otherwise" tests the limits of citizenship in the mid- to late-nineteenth century U.S., even as it adopts the discourses of imperial conquest.

Dickinson was not alone in her queer relation to domestic space and her tendency to invoke that space through the language of national geography. The subject of my third chapter, Charles Warren Stoddard's work, might be described as an extended negotiation between queer desire and normative models of domesticity, played out in the South Pacific and the American West. While he is the least read author explored in my dissertation, he remains a crucial figure in the transnational history of sexuality in the U.S. at the turn of the twentieth century. Known primarily for his semi-fictional travel sketches in the collection *South-Sea Idyls* (1873), his explicit homoeroticism—the ways it seems to simultaneously mirror and refuse "modern" sexual definition—has generally been understood in ways that Peter Coviello describes as "anticipatory" and "agnostic" approaches. Neither gay nor beholden to nineteenth-century models of sexuality, I argue that Stoddard's oeuvre represents a complex negotiation of these shifting discourses, a negotiation that takes on different valences and different genres over time, a negotiation that refuses those historical models. I argue that these changes—all negotiated in Tahiti and Hawaii—are related to ongoing U.S. efforts to occupy the "South Seas." I show that Stoddard's answer to the problem of (non)domesticity takes the form of the colonial consumption of indigenous bodies, lands, and labor.

Finally, my last chapter turns to the American Southwest, a landscape that was imagined by many in the early-twentieth-century U.S. as the last “frontier” in an increasingly modernized, consolidated nation-state, Willa Cather’s 1890s journalism and in her novels, *The Song of the Lark* (1915) and *The Professor’s House* (1925). For Cather, who traveled there frequently throughout her life with her long-time partner Edith Lewis, the American Southwest was certainly that, but it was also a space in which her protagonists cultivate queer attachments to “primitive” bodies and spaces, and in so doing erase “the old, fretted lines which marked one off, which defined [one]” (*Song of the Lark* 326). Cather is the single author in this study who lived her entire life after the consolidation of the homo-/hetero- binary in the U.S., but she famously refused a sexuality-based identity. That refusal has been variously interpreted as a product of shame and at times necessary secrecy, but queer critics from Eve Sedgwick and Judith Butler to Jonathan Goldberg and Marilee Lindemann have challenged such accounts and read Cather’s novels as complex dramatizations of “crossings” of social categories. Elucidating the crosscurrents of gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity in her work, these critics read Cather’s fiction as a form of radical social criticism that calls into question the supposed “naturalness” of those social frameworks. Almost simultaneously, however, a great deal of Cather criticism has attended to the ways in which Cather was complicit with discourses of American colonialism—while paying little attention to the role of sexuality in her work. Rather than treat these trends as antithetical and incommensurable, I argue that Cather’s frontier romances indeed challenge modern discourses of gender and sexuality—albeit in and through the racialized discourse of primitivism. In her novels, subjects racialized as “native” and “foreign” are imagined to be attached to an irretrievable, unspeakable, preferable past, one that is simultaneously a nineteenth-century U.S. “frontier” and a prelapsarian Eden. In these works, the “native” and the “foreign”

are the skin shed by the racial and geographical processes of early-twentieth-century Americanization and the “closing” of the “frontier.” Taking my cue from recent work on biopolitics in queer studies and critical race theory, I examine the role of primitivism in Cather’s works to demonstrate that while Cather’s work imagines queer alternatives to modern sexual taxonomies and pathologies, those alternatives do not inherently challenge the U.S. settler colonialism to which those taxonomies are entwined, but instead naturalize it through the figure of the exceptional queer subject who may refuse normative social modes through their imagined affinity with “primitive” bodies and lands.

Finally, in a brief coda, I discuss the recent turn in queer theoretical discourse to “the wild,” which has emerged as a reaction to the arguable normalization and institutionalization of “queerness” in the academy and beyond. I am skeptical of this critical move, not because I necessarily disagree that “queer” has lost some of its political bite in recent years, but because this new paradigm has been figured by its proponents (Halberstam, Nyong’o, Coviello, and others) in similar terms to those proposed by the authors under this study: the terms of primitivism. As an answer this turn toward “the wild,” I return to the poetry of Qwo-Li Driskill, whose poem “Map of the Americas” challenges non-Native ways of “seeing” Native bodies and subjectivities (a challenge I imagine proponents of “wilding” would readily support) but also challenges the primitivist trappings of “the wild’s” proposal to move beyond our current queer critical discourse. In its mapping and unmapping, Driskill’s “Map of the Americas” gestures toward a utopia in which we still walk with ghosts.

Chapter One
The Frontier Erotics of Whitman's Native Futurism

From January 1 to June 30, 1865, Walt Whitman held a post as a clerk at the Federal Bureau of Indian Affairs. During this six-month stint, besides the required bureaucratic tasks, Whitman encountered a number of delegations of indigenous peoples, who would often arrive there for the negotiation of land treaties. He was also making marks and marginalia for future revisions of a book that would, in the twentieth century, come to dominate discussions of gender and sexuality in Whitman's oeuvre: the third, 1860 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, the first edition of *Leaves* to include the now-immortalized "Calamus" and "Enfans d'Adam" poem-clusters.¹ At the same time that he was meeting indigenous delegates (and, reportedly, visiting some of them in their hotel rooms to speak with them with the help of an interpreter), Whitman was revising the edition of *Leaves* that not only makes the sexual element of his democratic-poetic project hyper explicit, but places it at the very forefront of that project.² In moods ranging from rhapsodic to morose, Whitman's expansive poetic "I" moves from lover to lover, from gender to gender, from the Atlantic coast and its metropolitan port cities to the Pacific. In the 1876 *Two Rivulets*, Whitman would later write of the "Calamus" cluster specifically: "Important as they are in my purpose as emotional expressions for humanity, the special meaning of the 'Calamus' cluster of *Leaves of Grass* (and more or less running through that book, and cropping out in 'Drum-Taps,') mainly resides in its Political significance" (*Poetry and Prose* 1035).³

It took a great deal of time for Whitman critics not only to take this pronouncement seriously, but to investigate its full import. Since 1979, gay, queer, and feminist critics have offered powerful interpretations of "the special meaning" of the "Calamus" cluster. That year marked the appearance of Robert K. Martin's highly influential work, *The Homosexual Tradition in American Poetry*, which offered the first sustained account of the homoeroticism in

Whitman's poetry.⁴ In Martin's radical reframing of Whitman's sexual-poetic politics, he argues that "Whitman's ideal society requires socialism, democracy, and homosexuality" (21). While this position has been both nuanced and critiqued, his identification of the intertwining of the sexual and the political in Whitman's work has become commonplace. So, too, has the connection between sexuality and radical egalitarianism. Since Martin, critics such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Byrne Fone, M. Jimmie Killingsworth, Alan Helms, Michael Moon, Michael Warner, Vivian Pollak, and Betsy Erkkila have countered a longstanding tendency in Whitman criticism that has both intentionally and unintentionally evaded, obscured, or erased the intimate entanglement of the (homo)erotic and the political that *Leaves of Grass* poetically performs.⁵ Following this counter-tradition, contemporary Whitman criticism seems to have reached a consensus that, as Michael Warner succinctly puts it, "Whitman wants to make sex public" ("Whitman Drunk" 40).

While I am indebted to this relatively recent queer and feminist counter-tradition of Whitman criticism, I want to challenge a line of thought that runs through it, one that sustains its own divisions: by emphasizing the "radical" and "democratic" nature of Whitman's sexual-political-poetic project, critics have tended to de-emphasize its spatiality, focusing instead on his temporal (that is, his future-oriented), progressivist social vision. These critics have focused on his desires for what America will or might or could be: an America that he believed erotic intimacies between men might engender. But, the intimate entanglement between Whitman's "radical" and "democratic" sexual politics and his nationalist, imperialist vision of United States expansion has remained overlooked. Whitman's third edition takes as its primary investment the "reproductive futurism" of the United States, a concept now made famous in American academic queer theory by Lee Edelman's important if highly contested work, *No Future* (2). While

Edelman attaches reproductive futurity to the heteronormative logics of political investments in the future (the Child), I recast Edelman's concept in terms of Whitman's "native futurism." This future not only includes but demands the sexually errant, the perverse, the "queer."⁶ But, while Whitman's poetry often disrupts the heteronormative, biopolitical imperatives of the United States nation-state, that disruption nonetheless depends upon an imperialist, expansionist vision. What America will or might or could be depended on a masculinist, expansionist vision of both poetic self and nation and the "open space" of an imagined frontier. This chapter thus traces the frontier erotics of Whitman's earliest efforts to describe the possibilities of queer futurity in the 1860 edition of *Leaves of Grass*. When we theorize his "radical" sexual politics and forgo its relation to a national/personal expansionist vision, we run the risk of naturalizing settler colonialism in the nineteenth century—and its effects in the present. Recently, Chandan Reddy has cautioned against a queer theory in which "sexuality names the normative frames that organize our disciplinary and interdisciplinary inquiries into our past," forgoing the ways in which such frames can reify, skirt, or obscure racist thought (18). With this in mind, it is vital for critics to interrogate those frames and ask how Whitman's radical sexual vision of democracy in many ways depended upon violence—obscured at times as it may be—against indigenous peoples in the U.S.

In so doing, this chapter builds on recent theorizations of biopolitics, especially in queer of color critique and queer native studies. Countering and building upon the theories of biopolitics put forth by Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben, these fields point to a radical reframing of their very terms, forcefully taking aim at their universalizing assumptions about political subjects and modernity. Foucault theorizes that "the modern state" is invested in the biological (self-) maintenance and (self-)regulation of political subjects, at once at the level of

the individual and at the level of the state's whole population. For many theorists, Foucault's and Agamben's universalization of "the modern state" and "the modern subject" situates that subject as always already European, white, and male, thus rendering absent the biopolitics of gender and race, as well as the histories of colonization and diaspora and their role in the making of the so-called "modern subject." As Ann Stoler contends, "the discursive and practical field in which nineteenth-century bourgeois sexuality emerged was situated on an imperial landscape where the cultural accouterments of bourgeois distinction were partially shaped through contrasts forged in the politics and language of race" (5). Scott Lauria Morgensen builds upon Stoler's insights by drawing close attention to the biopolitics of settler colonialism in a U.S. context. He makes the historical argument that "[the] late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw institutions and discourses of modern sexuality proliferate along with the 'closure' of the frontier as a central feature of national consciousness in a white settler society" (42). He argues further that "[settler] colonialism is a primary condition of the history of sexuality in the United States" (42). I would argue that the discourses of modern sexual identity proliferated—though in importantly different ways—earlier than the standard "around 1890" narrative first offered by Foucault and taken up implicitly or explicitly in a great deal of queer scholarship; and many critics have traced Whitman's own negotiations of these discourses. However, Morgensen's provocative claim challenges scholars to interrogate the settler colonial logics of displacement of Whitman's sexual-political project. In analyzing the queer nationalism of Whitman's 1860 work, I am indebted to recent work in queer Native studies, and particularly to Mark Rifkin's recently published *Settler Common Sense: Queerness and Everyday Colonialism in the American Renaissance* (2014), which theorizes the specifically *literary* significance of the biopolitics of settler sexuality. Tracing modes of what he calls "queer antistatism" in canonical texts in

nineteenth-century American literary studies (Hawthorne's *The House of Seven Gables*, Melville's *Pierre*, and Thoreau's *Walden*), Rifkin argues that, "while opening room for envisioning queer possibilities for occupancy and selfhood (deviations from nuclear domesticity), these writings treat processes of settlement as a given in developing their ethical visions" (3). Where my analysis departs from Rifkin's work, however, is in its attention to queerness that consolidates and depends upon—in fact endeavors to *reproduce*—the U.S. nation-state.

I investigate Whitman's queer frontier erotics—imagined in terms of expansion, fluidity, and abundant futurity—through an analysis of one of the first sustained poetic treatments of male-male intimacy written in the nineteenth-century U.S. I begin (and will end) with Whitman's involvement in the Federal Bureau of Indian Affairs in order to draw an explicit connection to Whitman's erotic poetry and his involvement with that federal agency, an agency that played pivotal roles in shaping U.S. government policy relations between the State and indigenous peoples and the mapping of U.S. national space. If the "frontier" has often been associated with masculinist and heteronormative visions of national space, reading the "frontier" erotics of Whitman's third edition of *Leaves of Grass* reveals the complex historical interconnections between queer sexualities and national expansion in the mid- to late-nineteenth-century U.S.

As I attend to Whitman's explicit gestures toward national/self expansion in the third edition of *Leaves of Grass* (and there are many), I also want to attend to their more quotidian moments of intimate belonging, analyzing the ways in which the erotics of Whitman's "I"—expansive, limitless, ever-fluid—imaginatively depends upon the naturalizing logics of settler colonialism. By attending to these concerns, I depart from critics who argue that Whitman's later writings indicate a more "racist" attitude than in his previous work. One example of this trend is

David Reynolds's *Walt Whitman's America*, in which he argues, "Although later in life [Whitman] would make prejudiced remarks about Native Americans, in 1865 he still possessed the democratic humanitarianism that had prompted his sympathetic portraits of the marriage of the trapper and the Indian in 'Song of Myself' and of his mother's loving encounter with a squaw in 'The Sleepers'" (455). The racialized biopolitics of settler colonialism, I want to suggest, operate in far less obvious ways than "prejudiced remarks," and are present throughout Whitman's politically complex career.⁷ Rather than concentrate on poems that explicitly celebrate U.S. expansionism (like, for example, "O Pioneers!" first published in the 1865 poetry collection entitled *Drum-Taps*), I focus on Whitman's erotic poetry because it reveals the expansionist implications of the "queer" forms of intimacy he hoped to engender.⁸

"Proto-Leaf": Inseminating Westward

It is not uncommon for literary critics to note the marked differences between Whitman's 1860 edition of *Leaves* and the previous two, in content and in form. These critics take their cue from Whitman himself, who advertised it in these very terms. One important and early noticeable difference is its opening poem, entitled "Proto-Leaf," which poetically, aesthetically, and erotically functions to frame the remainder of the third edition. As such, it is worth analyzing in detail.

Months before its publication, Whitman outlined his ambitions for the third edition of *Leaves of Grass* in an anonymous article published in the literary journal, *Saturday Press*, declaring both its difference from and superiority to the first two editions:

Those former issues, published by the author himself in little pittance-editions, on trial, have just dropped the book enough to ripple the inner first-circles of literary

agitation, in immediate contact with it. The outer, vast, extending, and ever-wider-extending circles of the general supply, perusal, and discussion of such a work, have still to come. The market needs to-day to be supplied—the great West especially—with copious thousands of copies.

Indeed, “Leaves of Grass” has not yet been really published at all.

(“Mockingbird” 232)

This proclamation was more than a mere advertising ploy; in a manuscript dated June 1857, he calls this project upon which he was embarking “The Great Construction of the New Bible” (“Notebooks” 1:353).⁹ Indeed, it has the very look of the popular King James Bibles being disseminated at the time (Stacy xviii-xxi). His self-portrait inside, a more conventional image of the “Poet,” marks a shift from the sexy, cocky, full-bodied Whitman of the first edition. One might argue that this shift in self-presentation was a conscious act on Whitman’s part to downplay the charged eroticism of this new edition, to promote his own legitimacy as a poet to be taken seriously. However, this would too readily dichotomize the sexual and the religious, as Whitman represents them. It also obscures the highly “Adamic” shift of that persona in the third edition: the simultaneously religious, political, and sexual significance to which I attend below.

Whitman’s ambitions were biblical as well as national.¹⁰ Publishing the third edition on the cusp of the Civil War, Whitman sought a means by which he might poetically unify a divided United States: this was to be the Great Bible to which all citizens might adhere, thus engendering a single body politic. If Benedict Anderson suggests in *Imagined Communities* that in the eighteenth and especially the nineteenth century the novel and the newspaper (both birthed following the emergence of print-capitalism) superseded the significance of religion in producing a sense of community under the banner of nationalism, the U.S. context saw something else

entirely: Whitman was not alone but following the example of many preachers who saw the dissemination of bibles in the West as integral to the expansion of a (Christian) national identity, like Lyman Beecher's influential *A Plea for the West* (1835).¹¹ While Whitman's interests were not exactly "Christian," they did endow national population expansion with holy significance. As his anonymous review makes clear, the strength and sustainment of that body politic prioritizes neither "North" nor "South," but the "West." Whitman's expansionist longing for an "outer, vast, extending, and ever-wider-extending" readership was not a mere literary or market ambition. He sought, as Peter Coviello has argued, "a visionary nationalism, structured around the promise of anonymous intimacies" (*Intimacy in America* 130). His aim to extend that literary network to the "great West" reveals the import of unbounded space to the survival of the anonymously intimate, unified nation for which he longed. It also reveals the ways in which his "expansive," future-oriented poetic vision ("still to come") had a physical-spatial reality, one of expansion to the "great West."

While the title "Proto-Leaf" might simply seem to indicate its position as the first poem in the edition, alternative definitions of the prefix "proto-" also suggest the biological and the sexual—the reproductive—aims of the poem: "at an early stage of development, primitive, incipient, potential" (OED). An indicatively temporal term, it nonetheless contains within it important spatial implications, as we will see. It is in this poem that he continues to elaborate the unique (and the "modern") potential of the U.S. landscape and its direct effect upon its art, its social character, and its place on the world stage. If in the first edition Whitman announced himself "Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs, a kosmos" who would dialectically and democratically absorb his national readership, in the third edition he takes on the position of a guide, a leader, shepherding his readers into a westward future: "Take my leaves, America!," he

demands his nationalized readership early on. “Make welcome for them everywhere, for they are your own offspring.” Spatializing his reproductive project, he commands his reader-lovers to spread outward, “everywhere.”¹²

The logics that frame that guidance are the logics of displacement. In Whitman’s advocacy of what Emerson had called “an original relation to the universe” (“Nature” 27), he appropriates—as he had done in previous editions—tropes associated with indigenous peoples, announcing himself at its beginning as “Fresh, free, savage” (*Third* 5). It is through these tropes that he is able to imagine an unencumbered “I,” which appears in the poem’s third line in the state of birth. Significantly, Whitman attaches that scene to a geographic location: “Fond of fish-shape Paumonok, where I was born.” Whitman associates the scene of the poet’s birth with the primitive savage, and he does so on “Paumonok,” the Native American name for what had become Long Island, New York during colonization. Emphasizing the Native Americanness of his biographical place of birth, Whitman asserts his own inherent savagery as birthright. Free from the state and free from normative, hierarchized modes of belonging, this unencumbered self is nonetheless tethered to and depends upon the perceived expansiveness of land, here through incorporation.

In the poem’s first stanza, in a catalogue typical of his aesthetic, Whitman sweeps across the soil; and while some have noted the continuous present tense in this poetic practice, here we see a definitively *future*-oriented cataloguing: he begins as a “Boy of the Mannahatta...” then presents alternative places from which he might come: “Or raised inland, or of the south savannas/ Or full-breath’d on Californian air, or Texan or Cuban air,/Tallying, vocalizing all—resounding Niagara—resounding Missouri,...” (5); and his catalogue continues until, by the stanza’s end, the multivalent boy-figure becomes a single “I”: “Solitary, singing in the west, I

strike up for a new world” (6).¹³ This enumeration of place names, an act of linguistic mapping, claims these spaces in an imperialistic mode. As Edward Said writes, “Imperialism...is an act of geographical violence through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted, and finally brought under control” (77). These alternative places allow this (emphatically male) child-figure not only to *encompass* vast expanses of space but to *tally* them, to *vocalize* or *name* them. That vocalization, that naming speaks to an act of claimed ownership.¹⁴ Here, we should not underestimate the colonialist metaphor linking the “west” with the “new world.” If Whitman’s “I” attempts to lead his readers forward in time, he also attempts to lead them forward in space, expanding outward to the north and the south (he lists Canada, Cuba, and Mexico as sites toward which he sounds his chants) but especially to the west (5-7).¹⁵

Whitman highlights the indicatively reproductive aspect of his westward advance. In the thirteenth stanza of “Proto-Leaf,” he writes, “Take my leaves, America!/ Make welcome for them everywhere, for they are your own offspring;/ Surround them, East and West! for they would surround you./ And you precedents! connect lovingly with them, for they connect lovingly with you” (*Third* 8). These impetus behind these lines, of course, is reproductive, with references to “offspring” and “precedents”; however, the lines invite an understanding of reproductivity that is not limited to (though it may include) heterosexuality or traditional marriage.¹⁶ The distinctions between male and female, active and passive, are blurred by a receptivity that is simultaneously command and plea to feminized yet agential “America.” And while “leaves” is of course a pun on the book’s title and the physicality of its pages, it is also seminal—as in the spreading of “seed.” It is unclear ultimately as to who has inseminated whom: has Whitman inseminated the reader? Or by reading has the reader inseminated the page, and thus Whitman? The queer erotic potential of reading that Whitman imagines takes on a spatial component: he

(rather vaguely) commands his reader to make space for his “leaves” but also to “surround them.” This is not a mere metaphor for parental nurturing but an incitement toward outward growth. In the future, Whitman predicts, “they would surround you.”

As the poem continues, and Whitman’s “I” continues to expand, cataloguing and encompassing peoples and places from Maine to California, he pauses. This pause offers his first explicit reference to indigenous peoples.¹⁷ The poem’s “I” stops his forward march in time and space to account for them, to take stock of them, to mark their place in national time:

On my way a moment I pause,

Here for you! And here for America!

Still the Present I raise aloft—Still the Future of The States I harbinger, glad and
sublime,

And for the Past I pronounce what the air holds of the red aborigines.

The red aborigines!

Leaving natural breaths, sounds of rain and winds, calls as of birds and animals in
the woods, syllabled to us for names,

Okonee, Koosa, Ottawa, Monongahela, Sauk, Natchez, Chattahoochee, Kaqueta,

Oronoco.

Wabash, Miami, Saginaw, Chippewa, Oshkosh, Walla-Walla,

Leaving such to The States, they melt, they depart, charging the water and the

land with names. (*Third 20*)

Whitman addresses a “you,” the reader, and syntactically parallels that “you” alongside “America.” He gives primacy to the “Present” and, in a fashion typical of Whitman’s persona

since his 1855 preface, “harbinger[s]” the “Future.” The “Future” here takes on a particularly imperialistic tone. Even as the 1855 Preface employed the language of American exceptionalism in national and literary terms under the rubric of “race” (“The American poets are to enclose old and new for America is the race of races” he writes there (*Poetry and Prose* 6-7)) it is far less clear where indigenous peoples fit into his grandiose national-world-vision. In “Proto-Leaf,” however, this issue is thrown into sharp relief: the “red aborigines” are not only distinguished from Whitman’s literary audience (they are distinct from the “you” addressee), but are consigned to the “Past” that Whitman’s “I” both claims and abandons. He claims indigenous languages for their incorporation into English in order to establish a unique “American” language, while the peoples themselves “melt” and “depart,” with seeming inevitability.¹⁸ Immediately following this stanza, Whitman’s “I” announces “A world primal again—Vistas of glory, incessant and branching./ A new race, dominating previous ones, and grander far” (*Third* 20). Because of the proximity of these lines to those explicitly representing—indeed, cataloguing—indigenous tribes, inscribing them into the land, “race” here cannot be understood as merely metaphorical or merely abstract nationalism. The language of “domination” also forces us to examine the interrelations of U.S. imperialism and Whitman’s “radical, democratic” vision. Who is included, who is excluded, in that political future-vision? And what are the logics of that inclusion and exclusion? While the “Enfans d’Adam” and “Calamus” poem-clusters may indeed offer a vision of—or a struggle toward—“vistas of glory,” at whose expense does that vision come?

“Enfans d’Adam”: Reading as Reproduction

Whereas “Proto-Leaf” articulates its erotic expansion through the act of accumulating place names, in “Enfans d’Adam” Whitman asserts the significance of erotically “reading” the

body. That “reading” in this section produces a reproductive relationship, one that later, in “Calamus” maps itself onto the “empty” landscape of the West. Whitman’s career evinces a desire to catalogue words, peoples, and places; the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass* is notorious for it. This practice has theorized by some critics as an attempt to democratize poetry in its “all-inclusiveness,” but in many ways it resembles the nineteenth-century “sciences” of phrenology and physiognomy, which Whitman embraced with aplomb—especially in the third edition of *Leaves of Grass*. These pseudo-sciences attempted, through readings of bumps on the head and features of the face, respectively, to taxonomize the “interior” truths of individuals’ characters. In many of these texts, those “truths” were indicatively racialized, and this feature has remained underexamined in discussions of Whitman’s relation to these “sciences” and their influence on his treatment of the erotic. I argue that phrenological theories of white supremacy influence Whitman’s desire for an expansive/erotic body politic.

Many critics have rightly connected phrenology and physiognomy to the poetry of “Enfans d’Adam” and “Calamus.”¹⁹ These readings tend to focus on two phrenological theories: “amativeness,” which describes the love between men and women; and “adhesiveness,” which describes the love between men. Michael Lynch’s important essay, “‘Here is Adhesiveness’: From Friendship to Homosexuality,” most clearly demonstrates that significance, arguing that phrenology provided Whitman a language for male-male desire prior to the advent of sexology and psychoanalysis. The usual critical assumption is that “Enfans d’Adam” poetically explores the former, while “Calamus” explores the latter. Betsy Erkkila has complicated this assumption, arguing first that the eroticism in these sequences is far more fluid and overlapping than this standard distinction suggests. It is worth noting that O. S. Fowler, one of the leading American phrenologists in Whitman’s time, and one whose theories Whitman was intimately familiar with,

notes that “adhesiveness” is “very strong, and generally a ruling one, in females; and its influence upon society, is incalculable” (*Practical* 65). Secondly, Erkkila argues that following the 1860 edition, these poem-clusters were always published beside one another, suggesting that they are more two parts of a whole than distinct (“Homosexual Republic” 160). I, too, wish to complicate this assumption; however, I am interested in examining their similar phrenological assumptions and reading them as two approaches to the reproduction of the “American” population.²⁰

While critics have attended to the import of “amativeness” and “adhesiveness” in this poetry, there seems to be little discussion of another side of phrenological theory: scientific racism. By analyzing the bumps of the head, phrenologists believed that they were able to determine certain personal characteristics of an individual. In doing so, many concluded that black and indigenous peoples inherently possessed inferior characters to those of whites.²¹ While I do not believe Whitman adopts these views wholesale in “*Enfans d’Adam*” and “*Calamus*,” I address the racial history of phrenology to suggest that, in his belief in “amativeness” and “adhesiveness” for the perfectibility of the “American race,” Whitman does adopt the logics of displacement that phrenologists’ scientific racism, for many, normalized. Nathaniel Mackey puts the matter poignantly:

[Phrenology] was a white way of knowing. It valorized obtrusion, surface, apparency, warding off the obscurities and indeterminacies of recess, crevice, fold. It was also white in another sense, serving other sense of whiteness. While its advocates preached self-improvement and social reform, the emphasis was by and large individualistic, seeking to better society through individual cultivation of the virtues of self-help—thrift, hard work, purity, perseverance. Its advocacy of

social reform, while populist in many respects, failed to offer its beneficence and promise of improvement to those who were not white; its will to reform didn't extend to reforming notions of racial determinism or the social relations upheld by such notions. (246-7)

Importantly, Mackey notes that theories of phrenology and theories of manifest destiny were intimately linked insofar as their explanations of human development and capacity configured whiteness as the highest form of humanity. He writes, "Like phrenology and along with phrenology, manifest destiny provided a hopeful hermeneutic, offering assurances of legibility, providentially mandated certainty, self-evident truth. Phrenology presented a version of manifest destiny at the individual level, mapping the head and making it readable, imprinted with a legible future, the individual's destiny manifest in the very bumps on his or her head" (248). For Whitman, queer forms of national intimacy would enable the improvement of the "American race." And, as I show, that intimacy depended upon the acquisition and perceived knowledge of "unsettled" land.²² Phrenology, physiognomy, and as Mackey points out, manifest destiny, were *theories of reading*. By attending to that reading practice, we begin to see the limits of that intimacy—its indicatively racialized character. As we have seen before, Whitman primitivizes the "red aborigines" as his Adamic "I" marches forward inevitably in time and in space, thus excluding indigenous peoples from an "all-inclusive," ideal future "America."²³

The first poem in the "*Enfans d'Adam*" sequence already introduces the spatialization of Whitman's reproductive aspirations:

To the garden, the world, anew, ascending,
Potent mates, daughters, sons, preluding,
The love, the life of their bodies, meaning and being,

Curious, here behold my resurrection, after slumber,
The revolving cycles, in their wide sweep, having brought me again,
Amorous, mature—all beautiful to me—all wondrous.

(*Third* 287)

The poem begins in a direction: *to* the garden, which expands into a world. In the very Francophonizing of the poem-cluster's title, Whitman evinces his global aspirations, providing a vision of a cosmopolitan America that incorporates and consumes other languages. As Henry Nash Smith argued long ago, the imagining of the Interior Valley as the "Garden of the World," a "vast and constantly growing agricultural society in the interior of the continent" was "one of the dominant symbols of nineteenth-century American society—a collective representation...that defined the promise of American life" (123). The present progressive tense of the poem ("ascending," "preluding," "meaning," "being," "revolving") suggests a link between present and future: indeed, the future is *contained within* the present; this would adhere to that shaping symbol of the Garden, which "embraced a cluster of metaphors expressing fecundity, growth, [and] increase..." (Smith 123). Yet, there is a past here, too: drawing on the figure of Adam to position himself as the progenitor of a new nation/alism, he simultaneously draws on Christ-like imagery ("behold my resurrection"). The cyclicity of the death and resurrection of Christ mirrors—and in fact, depends upon—the "revolving cycles" of nature. The attempt at reconciliation between Darwinian science and Christian religion at this time was not uncommon in the least, and phrenology in particular helped Whitman conceptualize what he saw as their mutuality.²⁴ Through the unsettling of the distinction between the natural and the religious, the present and the future, Whitman again invokes the feeling of inevitable presence. This, in turn, marks the future with inevitable western expansion. Whitman/Adam/Christ go *to* the garden, but

he has been there before. This is not only a temporal return: “The revolving cycles” also have a “wide sweep,” finally suggesting the blurring of distinctions between the temporal and the spatial, between outward and upward growth.

That outward growth is both a fantasy of escape from European influence and “civilization” *and* an evolutionary promise. “O I wish that you and I escape from the rest, and go utterly off—O free and lawless,” he writes in the second poem of the sequence. And later: “O you and I—what is it to us what the rest do or think?” (*Third* 288). The intimacy that Whitman sets up between writer and reader here is—not accidentally—a highly public one: the ideal woman-reader of Whitman (“...the perfect girl who understands me—the girl of the States”) addressed as “you” in the beginning of the second poem Whitman calls in the third person, “her,” after he identifies her (290). The privatized, and eroticized, act of reading almost immediately becomes a public act, even orgiastic:

From privacy—From frequent repinings alone,
From plenty of persons near, and yet the right person not near,
From the soft sliding of hands over me, and thrusting of fingers through my hair
and beard,
From the long-sustained kiss upon the mouth or bosom...(290)

Here, “private” sex has public ramifications. Neither “private” nor “public” suffice as modes of being in the first two lines above, and their distinctions become blurred through the act of writing and reading. By eroticizing that act, Whitman suggests that sexual acts cannot be conceived as merely private or merely public. Indeed, the rest of the poem may be read as a public sex act. Are those hands “her” hands or the hands of “plenty of persons near?” As the poem continues, Whitman employs anaphora, repeating “From” until the poem’s end. But this is a far different

“from” than that which begins the poem: “From that of myself, without which I were nothing” (280). At its beginning, Whitman is progenitive (“From the pent-up rivers of myself”). As the poem ends, the self becomes the syntactically passive receiver of a catalogue of pleasures. Agency, indeed, is muddled here: actors are replaced by body parts (“the act-poems of eyes, hands, hips, and bosoms”) and sensations (“the close pressure that makes me or any man drunk, fainting with excess,” “exultation, victory, and relief”). And by the end, the “I” becomes ejaculate: “From the night, a moment, I, emerging, flitting out,/ Celebrate you, enfans prepared for./ And you, stalwart loins” (291). It celebrates its own reproductive capacity, but the poem’s ambiguity allows an openness for understanding what constitutes such reproduction: the poem’s “you” that shifts to “her” proceeds to shift to “bed-fellow” to “the one.” Reproduction, for Whitman, results not only from the “amative” but from the fluidity of the “I” that the erotic allows. Still, if the gender relations here are less hierarchical and more fluid than traditional notions of heteronormative sexual relations, they are nonetheless marked by a particular ideology of ideal citizenship: he describes “the perfect girl who understands me” as “the girl of These States” (290). Their sex remains in service of the State; their sex reproduces expansionist futurity.

Whitman makes that fluidity remarkably clear in the seventh poem of the sequence. In this poem we begin to see the geological stakes of such fluidity.

You and I—what the earth is, we are,
We two—how long we were fooled!
Now delicious, transmuted, swiftly we escape, as Nature escapes,
We are Nature—long have we been absent, but now we return,
We become plants, leaves, foliage, roots, bark,

We are bedded in the ground—we are rocks,
We are oaks—we grow in the openings side by side,
We browse—we are two among the wild herds, spontaneous as any,...

(*Third* 309)

In this passage, he upends the familiar pastoral ideal of Romantic poetry and transcendentalist thought, in which a deeper connection to Nature allows the Poet to achieve a deeper understanding of himself and of humanity. The dichotomized hierarchy Man/Nature becomes a single communion: “what the earth is, we are,” “We are Nature.” Cataloguing what “we are” and what “we become,” the “You and I” of the poem expand, both “bedded in the ground,” sexualizing the landscape, and growing “in the openings side by side.” As the poem continues, and as the “You and I” become animal and atmosphere, they *become* the pastoral ideal. And it is not contemplation but eroticism that allows the convergence. As the poem continues, the self and even the pair seem to disintegrate in the erotic act of reading each other’s bodies.

But as it ends, the pair become themselves again—distinct, individual: “We have circled and circled till we have arrived home again—we two have,/ We have voided all but freedom, and all but our own joy” (*Third* 310). The circle-figure is one of the key figures in which Whitman imagines the expansive self and the expansive body politic—expansive but nonetheless closed, exclusive and exclusionary. This expansiveness takes on both figurative and literal meanings. The pair’s ambiguous but nonetheless highly charged eroticism here is imagined in those cyclical terms: outside of home, outside of time, indeed outside of the body. And it depends upon the assumption of limitless, unencumbered space. Becoming Nature, Whitman’s “You and I” achieve a transcendent erotic state beyond the limits of home, state, “civilization”—beyond hierarchized structures. If this erotic relationship can be described as dialectical, it erases, it

“voids” its dependence on westward expansion, perhaps suggesting a moment of ambiguity and ambivalence. Projecting that higher state onto nature, Whitman’s pastoral ideal “[voids] all but freedom, and all but our own joy,” announcing an individualism attached but not beholden to space understood in terms of the “frontier”; it is, in Mark Rifkin’s term, imagined as an “extrapolitical locale.”²⁵

At one moment in the sequence, the Adamic theory of the human would seem to eclipse the phrenological assumption of white supremacy:

Examine these limbs, red, black, or white—they are so cunning in tendon and
nerve,

They shall be stript, that you may see them.

...

Within there runs blood,

The same old blood!

The same red-running blood!

There swells and jets a heart—there all passions, desires, reachings, aspirations,

Do you think they are not there because they are not expressed in parlors and
lecture-rooms?

(Third 298)

Whitman merges discourses of science and religion for the purposes of democratizing the body, merging equality with biology. The Adamic *and* evolutionary theories that assume all humans to be part of the same species might seem to allow Whitman to momentarily interrogate the phrenological assumptions about the superiority and inferiority of “races,” as well as to interrogate those discourses in “parlors and lecture-rooms”—in short, in “civilized” space. But

he continues to read the body for exterior signs of racial difference, distinguishing types within species.

Throughout “*Enfans d’Adam*,” Whitman’s “I” depends upon “uncivilized” space to develop a democratizing, erotic, “amative” vision. Near the end of the sequence, his reproductive project is not finished: “Inquiring, tireless, seeking that yet unfound./ I, a child, very old, over waves, toward the house of maternity, the land of migrations, look afar./ Look off the shores of my Western Sea—having arrived at last where I am—the circle almost circled” (312). *Pater familias* and progeny, the Whitmanian “I” looks out onto the Pacific Ocean, waiting for the future, waiting for the circle to finally close. Having expanded himself (via his readers/lovers and their progeny), he asks, without answer, “And why is it yet unfound?” (312). It is in the “Calamus” sequence where we begin to see how he imagines that circle—the time and space of the future American body politic—might close, how he might find what he seeks.

“Calamus”: Making the Continent Indissoluble

In the first poem of the “Calamus” cluster, Whitman returns to the pastoral mode, though in some ways, this is a far more conventional pastoralization than we have previously seen:

In paths untrodden,
In the growth by the margins of pond-waters,
Escaped from the life that exhibits itself,
From all the standards hitherto published—from the pleasures, profits,
conformities,
Which too long I was offering to feed to my Soul;
...

Here, by myself, away from the clank of the world,
Tallying and talked to here by tongues aromatic,
No longer abashed—for in this secluded spot I can respond as I would not dare
elsewhere,
Strong upon me the life that does not exhibit itself, yet contains all the rest...

(*Third* 341)

Desire does not disintegrate the “I” into elemental Nature; it allows him to “escape” from “civilization”—“from the pleasures, profits, conformities” that have left his “Soul” malnourished. The poem seems to beg for an (albeit anachronistic) identitarian gay male reading: in such a reading, Whitman, having escaped from the heteronormative polis, imagines a space wherein men might live “the life that does not exhibit itself”; as he writes later in the poem, “To tell the secret of my nights and days” (342). But the reason it seems to beg for such a reading is precisely because of the stability of the “I” in this poem and in others in the “Calamus” sequence. That stability, I suggest, derives from Whitman’s imagined sovereignty—the “givenness” of both a self and the availability of land on which that self might roam and “tally.”

Robert K. Martin’s analysis of these opening lines is worth quoting in full, because it highlights the possible pitfalls of such readings:

This figure introduces a spatial element to the contrast already established between two points in time: the new space, like the new time, announces Whitman’s conversion. The new man is to inhabit a new world. The “untrodden” paths represent Whitman not only as the pioneer but also the “first man,” as Adam. Whitman’s dramatization of his conversion demands that we see himself as radically new, going alone into virgin land, whatever his knowledge of

other authors. While Whitman makes use of the pioneer and explorer metaphor, it is significant that he does not situate himself in a western landscape. In Whitman space is not a territory to be conquered (as is characteristic of male heterosexual literature) but a place “by the margins” to be explored, a “secluded spot” which is not a territory beyond but alongside. Instead of an extension in length, as in the metaphor of conquest, there is a broadening, an extension in width to include what was once seen as “marginal.” (*Homosexual Tradition* 54)

The “conversion” about which Martin writes is an avowedly secular one, a kind of “coming out” in temporal terms that the poem then maps out in spatial ones. Space in this poem, as Martin would have it, becomes a temporalized metaphor, and as such begins to take on a far more democratic approach to land (gendered as female) than standard masculinist tropes of land conquest. But this temporalizing and metaphorizing of space too hastily rejects the possibility that the politics of the Adamic “pioneer” figure and the desire for “gay” space might in fact be working in tandem. Martin argues that “it is significant that he does not situate himself in a western landscape,” and yet the “Calamus” cluster is littered not only with references to the “West,” but also to western expansion: of self, of nation, of progeny. That “the life that does not exhibit itself, yet contains all the rest” highlights the reproductive potential Whitman saw in male adhesive love on the “frontier.”²⁶ Whitman’s sovereign “I” contains not only life—in the seminal metaphor we have seen in “*Enfants d’Adam*” that is also present in “Calamus”—but “all the rest”: not only new life but the land that makes that possible, land that is imagined as empty, available, “untrodden.”

In the fifth poem of the “Calamus” cluster, later entitled “O Democracy!,” Whitman makes the reproductivity of adhesiveness most explicit. Writing in the future tense, his Adamic

persona prophetically announces the future America that his sexual-political poetry will bring forth:

There shall from me be a new friendship—It shall be called after my name,
It shall circulate through The States, indifferent of place,
It shall twist and intertwist them through and around each other—Compact they
shall be, showing new signs,
Affection shall solve every one of the problems of freedom,
Those who love each other shall be invincible,
They shall finally make America completely victorious, in my name.

(Third 349)

For Whitman, it is only through adhesiveness—and his adhesive poetics—that “The States” might be “Compact.” This “new friendship,” which “circulate[s],” “twist[s] and intertwist[s],” binds bodies and “States” in an almost orgiastic sense; if in “Calamus” 18 (later entitled “City of Orgies”), he celebrates a city of “Lovers, continual lovers,” this represents to him a small scale form of his primary desire: an orgiastic *nation*. If “Those who love each other shall be invincible,” so too will America be “completely victorious.” In other words, for Whitman, the State *depends* upon individual lovers, and empire depends upon quotidian eros. If, for Michel Foucault, the State’s investment in the management and maintenance of life is fundamentally a hetero-reproductive one, Whitman’s investment in a future inaugurated by “a new friendship” highlights the ways in which queer modes of belonging may not necessarily be antithetical to the State’s biopolitical imperatives—the production of a coherent, healthy, recognizable, yet expansive body politic:

I will make the continent indissoluble,

I will make the most splendid race the sun ever yet shone upon,
I will make divine magnetic lands.

I will plant companionship thick as trees along all the rivers of America, and
along the shores of the great lakes, and all over the prairies,
I will make inseparable cities, with their arms about each other's necks.

(*Third* 351)

The language of race and of land here speak to the political stakes of Whitman's reproductive-poetic project. Making not only the State but the *continent* "indissoluble," the sense of land in "Calamus" is not merely temporal or metaphorical (though they are indeed those as well). Expansive land is absolutely necessary for the expansive self, who expands by way of his progeny: "the most splendid race." Again, in a quasi-seminal metaphor, Whitman proclaims, "I will plant companionship thick as trees along all the rivers of America," and if this metaphor is seminal, it also upends the masculinist pioneer trope of (hetero)sexual conquest in intent but finally upholds it in effect. In the landedness of companionship as Whitman presents it exists the perceived self-evidence of the (future) State's sovereignty over land, as well as the perceived absence of Native Americans on that land. Vivian Pollak argues of the "Calamus" cluster, "Here race as a category of social analysis is subsumed by gender and perverse sexual desire. Implicitly, we read 'Calamus' as the story of unconventional *white men*" (124). If gender and sexuality are often fluid, anti-hierarchical, and "democratic," as Pollak suggests, the racialized logics that undergird that vision compel us to re-examine our frameworks for what constitutes the radical sexual citizenship Whitman attempted to poetically (re)produce in the third edition of *Leaves of Grass*. Whitman's utopic frontier is not, I contend, racially homogenous by accident

nor lack of imagination. When in poem 25 of the “Calamus” sequence, prairie-grass divides for Whitman and his progeny and his lovers, can we merely read this as metaphorical or as temporal? When in poem 30, Whitman offers “A promise and gift to California” “to teach robust American love,” and writes “For These States tend inland, and toward the Western Sea—and I will also,” is this merely a gesture toward sexual-democratic communalism (371)? In Whitman, *temporal* expansion into the future for which he calls depends upon the *spatial* expansion of “Americans” for whom he longed to follow him.

In the last poem of the “Calamus” cluster, Whitman writes to a future reader, enjoining his present and their future in a palpable yet fraught erotic union:

Full of life, sweet-blooded, compact, visible,
I, forty years old the Eighty-third Year of The States,
To one a century hence, or any number of centuries hence,
To you, yet unborn, these, seeking you.

When you read these, I, that was visible, am become invisible;
Now it is you, compact, visible, realizing my poems, seeking me,
Fancying how happy you were, if I could be with you, and become your lover;
Be it as it I were with you. Be not too certain but I am now with you.

(Third 378)

Whitman projects into the future an ideal reader who not only seeks him but *realizes* his poems, actualizing them in the sense of both discovery and *making real*: this reader, in their ideal form, is the product of Whitman’s sexual-political project having come to full fruition, a reader who can perceive the intimacy and eroticism of Whitman’s poetics and politics. Near the end of his

life, Whitman would call this ideal reader (who is also an ideal American citizen, who is also an ideal lover), a “native American.” As Ed Folsom has noted, “...Whitman...would never grant the Indians the word ‘natives.’ That was a word he reserved for what ‘real’ Americans would come to be when they fully and democratically absorbed the world around them” (*Native Representations* 85). Folsom goes on to explain, “Whitman sought to associate the quality of being native American with the qualities of absorption and democratic inclusiveness; in this sense, Indians could at best *become* a part of the native Americans, but were themselves *pre-Americans*, native to the land but not native to the country that in Whitman’s view brought that land to life” (85). But even as indigenous peoples could at best become a part of the native Americans, Whitman’s “native American” project depended upon the further colonization of land. Similarly, I would add, they are nonetheless written out of Whitman’s queer nationalist project. He positions them firmly within the realm of the past, as well as he imagines land as lifeless before expansion. Whitman’s reproductive future—by so many accounts “democratic,” “radical,” and “queer”—elides the lives of those whose citizenship is precarious within the U.S. nation-state, and operates within the logics of displacement.

Conclusion: Whitman’s Native Futurism

In 1871, Whitman published *Democratic Vistas*, a long prose work of political philosophy in which he developed and intermingled theories of democracy, poetry, and sexuality that would return to the themes of the 1860 *Leaves of Grass* and would continue to shape his literary efforts for the rest of his life. In *Vistas* we find the following passage in the form of a footnote:

It is to the development, identification, and general prevalence of that fervid comradeship, (the adhesive love, at least rivaling the amative love hitherto possessing imaginative literature, if not going beyond it,) that I look for the counterbalance and offset of our materialistic and vulgar American democracy, and for the spiritualization thereof. Many will say it is a dream, and will not follow my inferences: but I confidently expect a time when there will be seen, running like a half-lid warp through all the myriad audible and visible worldly interests of America, threads of manly friendship, fond and loving, pure and sweet, strong and life-long, carried to degrees hitherto unknown—not only giving tone to individual character, and making it unprecedently emotional, muscular, heroic, and refined, but having the deepest relations to general politics. I say democracy infers such loving comradeship, as its most inevitable twin or counterpart, without which it will be incomplete, in vain, and incapable of perpetuating itself. (*Poetry and Prose* 1005-6n)

Ten years later, Whitman's dreams for the future had, as yet, receded unrealized (to invoke a poem by Emily Dickinson, the subject of the following chapter). There is continuity with the third edition of *Leaves* evident here: the intermingling of the erotic and the political, the fervent hope for that ambiguous-and-yet-clear-as-day signifier, comradeship, and the utopic future imagined in reproductive terms. There is also change: he de-couples amativity and adhesiveness and prioritizes the latter, suggesting shifting conceptions of sexual object-choice in more stable, binaristic terms. So, too, does the passage suggest the givenness of American space as a knowable, albeit abstract, entity, with a discernible and singular character with its unique "worldly interests."

Juxtapose these theories with another passage written in 1888, near the end of his life. Whitman's *November Boughs*, a collection of poetry and prose, looks back fondly on the time he spent at the Federal Bureau of Indian Affairs. He recounts:

Along this time there came to see their Great Father an unusual number of aboriginal visitors, delegations for treaties, settlement of lands, &c...the most wonderful proofs of what Nature can produce, (the survival of the fittest, no doubt—all the frailer samples dropt, sorted out by death)—as if to show how the earth and woods, the attrition of storms and elements, and the exigencies of life at first hand, can train and fashion men, indeed *chiefs*, in heroic massiveness, imperturbability, muscle, and that last and highest beauty consisting of strength—the full exploitation and fruitage of a human identity, not from the culmination-points of “culture” and artificial civilization, but tallying our race, as it were, with giant, vital, gnarl'd, enduring trees, or monoliths of separate hardest rocks, and humanity holding its own with the best of the said trees or rocks, and outdoing them. (1194-5)

In this flowing passage, Whitman retrospectively looks upon these “aboriginal visitors” with admiration—an admiration that, as clause builds upon clause, suggests an “adhesive” quality. Admiring their “heroic massiveness, imperturbability, muscle, and that last and highest beauty consisting of strength—the full exploitation and fruitage of human identity,” Whitman's gaze not only begins to take on an erotic charge; he describes them in terms remarkably similar to the ideal companions of the “Enfans d'Adam” and “Calamus” sequences: “the most wonderful proofs of what Nature can produce.” But the passages that frame that gaze indicate the *difference* between the men here and the men and women and erotically charged land of those poems. His

parenthetical, “(the survival of the fittest, no doubt—all the frailer samples dropt, sorted out by death),” draws on evolutionary discourse which circumscribes indigenous peoples to the site of inevitable decline and death; indeed, *death* is the agential figure here who “sorts out” the “frailer samples” rather than the realities of settler colonialism, the conquest of land, and biopolitical imperialism. At the end of this passage, Whitman attributes the “full exploitation and fruits of a human identity” of these men to their distinction from Anglo-European culture. Here his language returns to the geological: “tallying our race, as it were, with giant, vital, gnarl’d, enduring trees, or monoliths of separate hardest rocks, and humanity holding its own with the best of the said trees or rocks, and outdoing them.” As he assumes the global dominion of “humanity” (“our race”), and indeed notes that his “aboriginal visitors” provide proof to support that dominion, that idea of superiority legitimates the imperialist project of land acquisition—and thus, the theft of land from indigenous peoples.

Between the time in which he published the third edition of *Leaves of Grass* and the time of his death in 1892, the United States’ expansionist policies—formal and informal—led to “the countless battles and massacres of the 1860s and 1870s (when names like Birch Coulee, Canyon de Chelly, Rosebud, and Warbonnet Creek entered the American common vocabulary), culminating in the Wounded Creek massacre at the end of 1890,” and alongside these battles and massacres followed shifting understandings of what constituted U.S. national space (Folsom, *Native Representations* 56). If these were political battles and massacres, these were also biopolitical ones. What Achille Mbembe writes of the “necropolitics” of the colony in a colonial state also describes the necropolitics of nineteenth-century American contact zones: they “are zones in which war and disorder, internal and external figures of the political, stand side by side or alternate with each other. As such, [they] are the location par excellence where the controls

and guarantees of judicial order can be suspended—the zone where the violence of the state of exception is deemed to operate in the service of ‘civilization’” (172).²⁷ The naturalization of this necropolitical space, whether it is “ignored or appears necessary or complete,” defines the settler colonialism that undergirds Whitman’s “queer” sexual-political project (Morgenson 16).

In *November Boughs*, the logics of settler colonialism—the naturalized “modernity” dependent upon national expansion—inform Whitman’s forward-looking proclamation: “As for native American individuality, though certain to come...it has not yet appear’d” (*Poetry and Prose* 667). For Whitman, the “native American” exists in the future. And this is a future that Whitman’s poetic persona, his famous all-encompassing “I,” attempts to engender from the outset of his poetic career. In the preface to the first, 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, he calls for a poet who “places himself where the future becomes present” (13); because of him, “a new order shall arise” (25). Whitman calls this “new order” in the “Calamus” sequence “the most splendid race the sun ever shone upon” (*Third* 351). As is clear in “Calamus” and “*Enfans d’Adam*” poetry sequences, Whitman believed that sex, both as a reproductive and a social or communal act, was imperative in the creation of that “race of races,” that “new order,” that “native American individuality.” But if Whitman held fast to the belief that in America lay the promise of new modes of erotic citizenship and modes of being, this promise depended on the logics of indigenous displacement; the conceptualization of land-as-*tabula rasa* on which he could project a better, “queerer” national union; and the imaginary utopic not-yet of the United States that consigned indigenous peoples to a distant past.

Chapter Two
The Queen of New England Goes to Peru:
Queer Sovereignties in Emily Dickinson's Southern Eden

To be Susan
is Imagination,
To have been
Susan, a Dream –
What depths
of Domingo
in that torrid
Spirit!

Emily ‘

*(Open Me Carefully 233)*¹

So wrote Emily Dickinson in a short letter in the early 1880s, near the end of her life, to Susan Huntington Gilbert Dickinson. Susan was Dickinson's neighbor and friend who had married her brother Austin and had become her sister-in-law in 1856. Dickinson shared a remarkable letter correspondence with Susan from 1850 to 1886, stretching from the time she was twenty years old to the year of her death. The letter above is indicative of the tenor of much of their correspondence: whimsical, but also longing, deeply personal, but also opaque, perhaps even alienating. The letter bespeaks Dickinson's longing to inhabit the sphere of Sue's spirit and the pained acknowledgment of that spirit's "foreignness," what Dickinson describes as its "Domingo" quality. As in so many of their letters, this one is remarkable not only for the brevity with which the letter-poem conveys the raw intensity of its feelings, but for the ways in which it

illuminates Dickinson's poetic practice *not* as solitary or shut out from the world—as she has been read so often across the twentieth century— but as *collaborative*, in some senses shared.

Reading this letter, as well as this correspondence over the years, it would be difficult to claim that Dickinson and Susan's relationship was untroubled. Still, as Betsy Erkkila has noted, feminist and queer scholars have often done just that, and “in their attempt to enact and enforce a feminist and at times utopian model of loving sisterhood, these critics have tended to romanticize the relationship between Dickinson and Gilbert.” Against this tendency, she discusses the importance of attending to “the difference, the pain, and the ‘bladed’ words that were also part of their love” (“Homoeroticism” 163).² Still, it is by now widely acknowledged, by Dickinson critics of many stripes, that the correspondence with Susan proved a vital resource in both her life and her poetic process—and not only that. It has compelled us to re-examine that process by attending more rigorously to the materiality of her textual production and to take seriously the primacy she gave to “letter-poems,” which she sent to a select group of interlocutors, the most important (if we are to judge by the sheer number and duration) of whom was Susan. This practice of distribution challenges longstanding binaries between private (or the so-called “domestic”) and public. Indeed, in the case of a handful of letters that she sent specifically to Susan, it challenges the binary between “foreign” and “domestic” national space.³

Why, in that brief, enigmatic letter, did Dickinson describe the “depths” of Susan's “torrid spirit” as “Domingo?” In this chapter, I attempt to answer this somewhat unanswerable question by way of exploring broader theoretical and historical questions that will illuminate not only new ways of reading Dickinson but new ways to think about the biopolitics of gender, sexuality, and nationalized space in the mid- to late-nineteenth century. What is the nature of Dickinson and Susan's relationship, a relationship that developed during a crucial time in the

history of sexuality in the U.S. As Peter Coviello has recently argued, this was a time “before it was assumed that every person and every intimacy could be assigned a hetero- or homosexuality, but in which the first stirrings of that great taxonomical division, the initial movements of coordination and solidification, could already be felt” (*Tomorrow’s Parties* 4).⁴ What is not only the erotic and affective, but the political content of that relationship? What is its *biopolitical* content?⁵ And most importantly for the purposes of this chapter, why, throughout their roughly thirty-five year correspondence, did Dickinson, with some consistency, deploy a number of images and references to Latin America to describe their relationship?

By asking these questions I am building on the work of early Dickinson critic Rebecca Patterson, who in her posthumously published *Emily Dickinson’s Imagery* (1979) noted the extent of Dickinson’s Latin American imagery and the fervor of Dickinson’s adoration of Susan, and offered tantalizing suggestions that the two might be related. Patterson’s editor rightly notes that, like Dickinson, her style is suggestive, “prodding her readers to work out for themselves the conclusions and implications of her analysis” (xiii). In this chapter, I attempt to work out those conclusions and implications by drawing on and contributing to contemporary debates within literary studies, including feminist and queer scholarship that has developed since Patterson’s death, as well as the transnational/global turn in Americanist scholarship. I hope to flesh out what I take to be some of the meanings and implications—historical, political, poetic, and erotic—of Dickinson’s lavender Latin Americanism.

Dickinson’s nearly lifelong practice of distributing her poems and letter-poems to only a small cohort of confidants, and her tendency to connect her poems to daily realities both mundane and emotionally charged, mark her poetics as profoundly personal. We lose a great deal of the poet’s power if we divorce Dickinson’s poetry from this context. This is not to consign her

to some idealized “private sphere,” divorced from history. It is to take seriously her emotional life and its impact on her poetic process. It is also to draw on recent developments within queer theory, to insist on the *public*-ness of the queer feelings that her letter-poems convey.⁶ When Dickinson deploys her Latin and South American references and images in her letter-poems to Susan, she draws on a public language to create a “private” space between them: one that exists for Dickinson and Susan only, in a shared past that never was, in a shared future that would never come to be. When we listen to these fantastical utterances, we become attuned to the ways in which her projections onto other lands bespeak her continual discontent with her emotional—which is also political—present. She longs for a certain mode of sovereignty beyond disembodied individualism; she seeks sovereignty through mutual exchange, even dependence.⁷ Tracing the political and erotic significance of her Latin American references, I argue that her identification with Latin America is not merely a mirror of U.S. imperialist discourses that would come to characterize U.S./Latin American relations in the late nineteenth century; rather, it blurs the binary of colonizer and colonized, “Global North” and “Global South.”⁸ To be clear, I do not propose that Dickinson “transcends” the colonial or imperial discourses of her time, place, and social status; in fact, it will be evident that quite the opposite is true. Nonetheless, I maintain that to describe the queer erotics of her Latin American-centered letter-poems to Susan as simply an erotics of conquest is to dismiss the ways in which her desire troubles normative modes of national and intimate citizenship and belonging. Neither aspect of these erotics is mutually exclusive; indeed, they are mutually constitutive.

If this chapter urges Dickinson critics to read her poetic practice in a somewhat different vein than in the public/private debate, it also attempts to make a theoretical intervention in the debates about biopolitics in the context of nineteenth-century American culture—with particular

attention to the concept of sovereignty. Sovereignty has long preoccupied political theorists of democracy.⁹ In biopolitical theory, it takes on a particular register, in part due to the influence of Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*. Here, Foucault marks a historical shift, beginning in the seventeenth century in "the West," *from* sovereign rulership *to* biopolitics. In other words, if before the seventeenth century sovereignty was defined as a ruler's "right to *take* life or *let* live," biopolitics is a sociopolitical structure in which modern states "[exert] a positive influence on life, that endeavors to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations" (136-7). As this description attests, for Foucault, modern state power is invested in reproduction not only of norms but of the literal reproduction—and subsequent management and self-management—of human populations. The era of sovereignty, in this account, is a bygone era by the end of the nineteenth century. And yet the concept continues to haunt the cultural and political field, as well as political and cultural theorists. Giorgio Agamben has since expanded and revised Foucault's theories, concentrating on the ways in which modern states exercise sovereignty during moments of political crisis, yielding to a "state of exception" in which the right to take life forgoes universalized geopolitical demands for "human rights."¹⁰

Feminist, queer, and critical race theorists have roundly critiqued both Foucault's and Agamben's accounts for their ahistoricity as well as their inability to account for gendered and racial (as well as other forms of) difference.¹¹ Along with Georges Bataille, but in a different vein, I want to ask about the erotics—the fantasy life—of sovereignty, and of a particular nineteenth-century woman author's desire for it: one that looks very different from those articulated by theorists of biopolitics.¹² This form of sovereignty is relational, between women, historically contingent, but also dependent upon both lived realities and geographical fantasies.

What Dickinson offers us is an historically-situated account of the *desire for sovereignty*, one that would seem to depart from individualistic, abstract, and ahistorical theorizations, but one that also attests to the concept's power in its very malleability, and its relevance to both theories of biopolitics, gender and sexuality studies, and nineteenth-century Americanist literary studies.

Vesuvius at Home: Sovereignty and the “Domestic Sphere”

Could a woman be a sovereign in the domestic sphere in nineteenth-century Amherst? The relationship between sovereignty and domesticity might seem, upon first consideration, to be a fraught one. Dickinson's relationship to the domestic might be said to occupy an over-determined space in feminist- and queer-inflected Dickinson scholarship. Much of this scholarship attempts to determine where she falls ideologically and personally in debates regarding the gendered discourse on separate spheres. The earliest criticism in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century—in her own time but especially after the first publications of her poems—characterizes her as an essentially “private” poet: an agoraphobic, literalized “madwoman in the attic” whose proto-feminist consciousness met a highly patriarchal world and retreated to a poetry—as well as a life—of interiority.¹³ In these accounts, the space of the mind is the space of the home, cut off from the daily realities and vulgarities of the “real world.” And in these accounts, the discourse of separate spheres often risks naturalization and self-evidence: the home and interiority naturally converge.

Many feminist critics, dedicated to de-naturalizing such discourses and demonstrating the ways in which they were sutured to gendered hierarchies that de-valued women's culture and diminished women's opportunities, have combatted this depiction of Dickinson with one that demonstrates the highly *public* aspect of her writing. For example, Shira Wolosky's 1984 *Emily*

Dickinson: A Voice of War, often cited as one of the first examples of this trend, observes that the first half of the 1860s was not only the time of the American Civil War, but also Dickinson's most productive period of writing in her lifetime. She argued that while Dickinson was a "private poet," she shared many of the public, national concerns of her contemporaries; that Dickinson's famous meditations on death were directly influenced by the news of the Civil War, which she followed daily; and that she employed much of her cultural milieu's political rhetoric in her poetry. Since the 1990s, critics of domesticity influenced by cultural studies, postmodernism, and poststructuralism have further argued that the "public/private" debate in general and in relation to Dickinson relied too heavily on binaries that simplified how those discourses work *in tandem* but also in multiple, sometimes contradictory ways.¹⁴ Lora Romero's important *Home Fronts: Domesticity and Its Critics in the Antebellum United States* (1997) was crucial for this re-examination. While Romero does not discuss Dickinson's work, her theoretical intervention has compelled scholars to revise the well-worn debate as to the "private-ness" or "public-ness" of Dickinson's life and work. Amy Kaplan's work has also demanded a re-evaluation of the meanings of domesticity in the mid-nineteenth-century U.S. Analyzing what she has consequentially termed "manifest domesticity," she argues that in many realms of discourse, including the literary, in the mid-nineteenth century U.S., "the meaning of the domestic [relied] structurally on its intimate opposition to the notion of the foreign. *Domestic* [had] a double meaning that [linked] the space of the household to that of the nation, by imagining both in opposition to everything outside the geographic and conceptual border of the home" (25). These revisions are crucial for my discussion of Dickinson's meditations on sovereignty. Almost always, in political theory as well as in Dickinson criticism, sovereignty tends to be configured as an indicatively "public" political and ontological state; furthermore, Dickinson often invokes

the double sense of home about which Kaplan writes, relating the bourgeois home to the domestic space of the nation and configuring herself as within and without both.

In carving a space for Dickinson as a feminist forebear, many feminist Dickinson scholars attempted to demonstrate the highly *undomesticated* quality of her poetry. In her pathbreaking essay, “Vesuvius at Home: The Power of Emily Dickinson” (1976), Adrienne Rich suggests that, contrary to the then standard reduction of Dickinson “to quaintness or spinterish oddity,” the poet should be read as “too strong for her environment, a figure of powerful will, not at all frail or breathless...” (179-80). Indeed, Dickinson was not only critical of her environment (her home, Amherst, and even the United States). In her poetry and her letters addressed to the women closest to her, she often expresses her longing for geographies outside of these enmeshed spaces—even if those geographies appear, paradoxically, within those very spaces. Since the publication of Rich’s essay, feminist critics have drawn from and complicated Rich’s re-reading, further exploring Dickinson’s “intense woman-to-woman relationships” as well as the woman-centered, anti-patriarchal elements of her work (177).¹⁵ As noted above, while I am critical of a tendency in some of this work to romanticize Dickinson and Gilbert’s relationship, this chapter investigates Dickinson’s utopian, Susan-centered poetic gestures—even if that utopian model cannot be said to accurately describe the daily realities of Dickinson’s relationships with women. I argue that that very utopia of mutual sovereignties depends upon an exoticized vision of “foreign” Latin American space, which she imagines as simultaneously outside of home and nation but also grounded firmly within them.

Re-reading Dickinson compels us to rethink the concept and even the “feeling” of sovereignty, to ask how it might manifest differently if we were to untether it from (or at least to loosen its ties to) disembodied whiteness, maleness, public-ness, or possessive individualism, all

of which rely on socially constructed gendered and racial binaries and hierarchies. What might sovereignty look like when *shared* between women, rather than *possessed*?¹⁶ What if it depended upon togetherness, a kind of radical co-dependence, rather than radical individuality?

Dickinson's poetic exploration of "home" as been well documented. As Judith Farr has noted, "the word 'home' appears more than five hundred times in her extant letters" (152). Farr attributes this frequency to Dickinson's deep affective attachment to her familial home. However, in many of her poems and letters, "home" appears as that which constricts, imprisons, or is unattainable. Rather than argue over which theme is more representative of her work as a whole, it would perhaps be more generative to ask how home and domesticity operate on multiple discursive levels, and what the possible contradictions and overlaps in meaning might tell us.

In a playful 1862 poem, Dickinson's somewhat melancholic first stanza evokes a feeling of homelessness—one that even heaven cannot remedy:

I never felt at Home – below –
And in the Handsome skies
I shall not feel at Home – I know –
I dont like Paradise –

(F437)

In these opening lines, she fits neither "below" nor in the "Handsome skies" because she "knows" that a home does not exist for her in either space. It is worth noting the rather consistent "I"s that litter this stanza: four in four lines, as well as the "I" sounds in "skies" and "Paradise" that complete the second and fourth lines. If her earthly home seems rather general and unmarked by gendered limitations here, it is useful to attend to the lines that end this poem. The

“I” predicts that, at the time of her death, “Myself would run away/ From Him – and Holy Ghost – and all” (lines 14-5). Employing the language of “myself” rather than the linguistically conventional “I” emphasizes her self-possession, her incompatibility not only the enigmatic “Him” (God? The Father?), but also “all.” It is not only God/The Father, but also earthly and heavenly community, perhaps even life and death themselves. She imagines a space in which she might be sovereign, even if the subject can only articulate this desire in negative terms (“never,” “shall not,” “dont”).

In a later poem, Dickinson’s “I” imagines home as a *prison* in which she is held prisoner:

How soft this Prison is
How sweet these sullen bars
No Despot but the King of Down
Invented this repose

Of Fate if this is all
Has he no added Realm
A Dungeon but a Kinsman is
Incarceration – Home.

(F1352)

If the poem conveys a (literal) death, associating the “prison” with the grave, its emphases on home, kinship, and nationalized space invite a consideration of the poem’s gendered/spatial dimensions.¹⁷ Perhaps most jarring here is her use of adjectives, “feminine” qualities (“soft” and “sweet”) associated with the mother and the domestic sphere. It is also worth noting, though perhaps obvious, that “the King of Down” rules over this “Home,” juxtaposing the firmness of a

patriarchal ruler and the softness of down feathers. It is that very softness with which he rules—the feminization of the domestic space—that imprisons her. “Kinsmen” themselves are “dungeons,” suggesting that Dickinson’s “I” experiences familial relations, and the soft rulership ever-present in those relations, not only as constricting, but imprisoning, “Fate”-defining.

Of particular interest in this poem is that Dickinson figures the space of the home as a “Realm,” inviting a conception of the domestic not merely as the space of the home, but also geographic, a national space. We can see, in one of her letters to Susan, Dickinson’s explicit resentment about the political place of women in the U.S. When her father traveled to Baltimore for the national Whig convention in 1852, he delivered this letter to Susan, one that takes on an anarchistic, even violent tone: “I don’t like this country at all, and I shant stay here any longer! ‘Delenda est’ America, Massachusetts and all!” (*OMC* 24). This exclamation points to an indicatively gendered predicament: being tethered to the very political geography that excludes one from full participation. Betsy Erkkila attributes this letter to Dickinson’s “knowledge of her exclusion from the constituted orders of masculine political power” which “leads her into a fantasy of destruction...terrorist dreams of violence against state and nation” (“Homoeroticism” 166). While I agree that this letter strongly suggests Dickinson’s knowledge and critique of the gendered inequalities implicit in normative notions of political activity, Erkkila’s extension into a “fantasy of destruction” perhaps goes too far. Rather, the letter conveys national disidentification—one embedded with not a little irony. Instead, we might posit that Dickinson here fantasizes about other forms of political being, political agency: forms that her ongoing correspondence with Susan might have made possible.

In a letter-poem that Dickinson sent to Susan, which Hart and Smith date to the early to mid-1860s, in the middle of Dickinson’s most productive period, she articulates just this political

otherwise. She begins with a familiar topic—the Soul—in familiarly defamiliarizing ways. In this piece, perhaps more than any others with the exception of the canonized “The Soul selects her own Society” (F409), she relates concerns of the soul with concerns of the self: the self in and as nationalized society. In so doing, she explicitly invokes the concept of sovereignty:

The Soul unto itself
Is an imperial friend –
Or the most agonizing Spy
An Enemy – could send –
Secure against it’s own –
No treason it can fear –
Itself – it’s Sovereign – of itself
The Soul should stand in awe –
Emily –

(*OMC* 86)

The Soul stands alone, in a pronounced way, in the first line of the poem. One noun, one pronoun, no verbs. The verb “Is” immediately follows, to describe the singular Soul as something multiple: a friend that is both self and other. The Soul is also “imperial,” connoting several ambivalent references. In Dickinson’s dictionary, it would have meant “royal, aristocratic, or majestic”; it also would have meant “masterful, commanding, imperious, overwhelming.”¹⁸ This may suggest the double edge of a “soul unto itself”: it can be a friend of royal proportions, but it can also overwhelm and master itself. It is worth noting that “imperial” interrupts the poem’s iambic meter and inserts an extra syllable in a line that, had it followed a regular pattern, would have been six. “Imperial” sonically, literally, overwhelms the line. What

follows is an “Or” which disrupts the poem’s otherwise regularized rhythm. It is as though the speaker cannot decide how to characterize this Soul, and attempting to get at its meanings disrupts her desires for regularity. This time, it is “the most agonizing Spy/ An Enemy - could send -.” The inclusion of a spy, a kind of “double agent” from outside political/geographical boundaries, here is strange; to characterize it as “agonizing” is perhaps even stranger. The self might be both multiple and sabotaging. First, it invites a political reading, one we have already seen: Dickinson characterizes the self, or the soul, as a land or political geographic entity, one that faces the risk of encroachment. But here is the paradox: who is this anonymous Enemy?

The next two lines seem to answer this question, albeit in a slanted way: “Secure against it’s own -/ No treason it can fear.” These lines are ironic because the speaker gives false, or at least ambivalent, hope; can one be secure against oneself? Security for the Soul/self, the poem seems to suggest, is always in relation to an other. “It’s own,” though, is a strange turn of phrase, made stranger by its incorrect grammar (“it’s”). Thus the question becomes: “its own what?” Treason, another indicatively political word, evinces betrayal but in national terms, in turn nationalizing the self (not unlike a queen). But the treason that the poem’s subject fears is, again, paradoxical. If the subject is secure, it can only be so *from itself*. Just as a state’s security depends, to a great extent, on the micro-level self-disciplining of its citizen-subjects, the self depends upon an impossible self-disciplining of the psyche; time and time again, we see Dickinson’s poetry exploring and testing the limits of that self-governing project.¹⁹ The next line identifies this solipsistic itself-ness: “Itself - it’s Sovereign - of itself.” “Itself” visually bookends the line, contains its contents; even the repetitiveness of “its” lends itself to its self-contained quality. In the middle of the line “Sovereign” seems to replace the self with the verbal repetition of “its,” here with an apostrophe. As a possessive pronoun, it suggests the historical regime of

kingly sovereignty; as a verb, “it is,” it suggests a new regime of subjective sovereignty. Sounding the same, this word points to the possibility that these two meanings might exist at once. Sovereign self independent of sovereign nation: protected from intrusion, but always under threat of self-implosion. “The Soul should stand in awe,” the poem ends. “Awe” is another ambivalent Dickinsonian word, connoting both admiration and wonder, but also terror. It is also a word that immediately places the poetic subject *in relation*. Can the Soul stand unto itself? the poem’s subject seems to ask. Is that even its ideal state? The mere fact that Dickinson desires an audience (and a very particular one) for this meditation, however intimate—or perhaps because it is so intimate—suggests otherwise.

This is far from the only moment in which Dickinson meditations on the self in geographical and national terms. In many of her poems, she imagines her poetic “I” as foreign within domestic/national space, simultaneously inside and outside the imagined boundaries that that space demarcates. In a particularly representative poem, the “I” identifies with non-U.S. lands and constructs a non-U.S. space for herself *within the domestic*:

Volcanoes be in Sicily
And South America
I judge from my Geography
Volcano nearer here
A Lava step at any time
Am I inclined to climb
A Crater I may contemplate
Vesuvius at Home

(F1691)

Her “Geography,” self-defined and self-imagined, allows the “I” to “contemplate / Vesuvius at Home,” a “foreign” force that has the potential to erupt and destroy that very “home”: the U.S. domestic sphere. Dickinson echoes this sentiment in poem 360, “The Soul has Bandaged moments – ,” in which she imagines a feminine “Soul,” who has “moments of escape - / When bursting all the doors - / She dances like a Bomb, abroad...” (lines 11-3). The simile here places the “Bomb, abroad” firmly within the domestic landscape. “Bursting all the doors” disfigures the stark separation from inside and outside, home and public, domestic and foreign territory. It is that disfiguring that allows her imaginative escape, to imagine herself as a sovereign “I” in foreign lands, even as her location remains in the “prison” of the home, which may not be so imprisoning after all.

The Queen of New England

Because I see – New Englandly -

The Queen, discerns like me –

Provincially –

(F256)

Long understood as an assertion of a kind of staunch regionalism, the lines above might now be read as a brief meditation on the limits of cultural positionality but also the possibility of mutual exchange, mutual understanding. Dickinson suggests that a similar kind of “discernment” the difference and distance between a “New England” woman’s perspective and the perspective of a “Queen” who, while she isn’t given a place with a proper noun, is certainly implied to be “elsewhere.” In many poems, Dickinson constructs the sovereign, powerful, and markedly feminine persona of the “queen” to depict her position as a simultaneous insider and outsider in

the domestic spheres of home and nation. Feminist critics have long engaged with these poems as evidence of Dickinson's defiance of patriarchal structures and expectations.²⁰ Recently, Paul Crumbley has noted the extent to which Dickinson deploys her "monarchical vocabulary": fifty-six references to the color purple, nineteen variants of "sovereign," and "other references to royalty abound..." (30-31). As against Betsey Erkkila and Domhnall Mithell, who both take this vocabulary to represent Dickinson's class elitism and anti-democratic beliefs, Crumbley asserts that Dickinson's use of these terms should not "automatically undermine her democratic allegiances" (31); rather, Crumbley's Dickinson is one for whom individual sovereignty is essential for democratic thought, praxis, and poetics.²¹ I argue that by positioning herself as a "foreign queen" within the domestic space of home and nation, Dickinson imagines a space in which she might rule: her queenly self isn't so much an example of "Whiggish conservatism," or her "liberalism," as it is a gesture toward a political otherwise, as well as erotic one, in her letters to Susan.

There are marked similarities — with crucial differences — between Dickinson's queenly persona and what Lauren Berlant, in *The Queen of American Goes to Washington City* (1997), has called "diva citizenship." These similarities, and these differences, bring to light the biopolitical dimensions of Dickinson's poetics of queenliness. Max Cavitch makes such a connection when he cites Berlant in his essay, "Dickinson and the Exception," noting in Dickinson's work the "diva-tinged strategy" of a "royalist strain" (qtd in 227-8). For Berlant, acts of "diva citizenship" "are acts of strange intimacy between subaltern peoples and those who have benefited by their subordination"; acts of diva citizenship "[do] not change the world. [They are moments] of emergence that [mark] unrealized potentials for subaltern political activity" (222-3). I want to suggest that while Dickinson's diva citizenship takes quite a different

shape, the concept is useful for understanding Dickinson's queenly persona because she at once identifies with positions of absolute political power as well as she identifies with the geographic (and perhaps even racial) otherness of Latin America. This identification with Latin America does not merely, or does not only, replicate U.S. colonialist imaginaries; it may also be read as an implicit critique of Dickinson's political present.

One feature of Dickinson's "royalist strain" is her identification with what she perceives as the "foreign." In poem 347, she identifies foreignness with nature. At first, she fears the plants and animals with whom she comes into contact: "I dreaded that first Robin..." "I dared not meet the Daffodils -," "I could not bear the Bees should come" (lines 1, 9, 17). The foreignness that she attaches to these plants and animals, and the fear that that foreignness evokes, is most evident in her depiction of daffodils and bees. In the former:

I dared not meet the Daffodils -
For fear their Yellow Gown
Would pierce me with a fashion
So foreign to my own -

(lines 9-12)

And in the latter:

I could not bear the Bees should come,
I wished they'd stay away
In those dim countries where they go,
What word had they, for me?

(lines 17-20)

It is their difference—exoticized by their “fashion,” their “dim countries,” and their foreign language—that is the source of her dread. In the case of the daffodils, she fears that that difference in fact might be superiority; in the case of the bees, it is linguistic disconnect. Both reflect an anxiety about her human superiority; the language of culture—fashion and language—invites one to read this as a poem about the anxiety of cultural superiority, as well.

The penultimate stanza of the poem makes a sudden shift, though. Suddenly, she no longer fears them; they are her royal subjects:

They're here, though; not a creature failed -
No Blossom stayed away
In gentle deference to me -
The Queen of Calvary -

(lines 21-4)

Why the sudden shift here? And why, in a poem so seemingly unconcerned with religion, does the “I” suddenly associate herself with the death of Christ? Her sudden identification with nature, I suggest, is an identification with foreignness. Rather than figuring herself as a “female Christ” as many critics have done before, I read her connection to nature and its foreignness as a heretical act: she is more a “female Pontius Pilate” than a “female Christ.” That identification allows her to imagine her own sovereignty, her own rulership—her right to decide who lives or dies. Thus, feeling “foreign” is both a source of both great pain, as the first section of this essay has shown, and great power. It is also, and perhaps most importantly, dependent upon her *relation*—her identification with—a kind of “foreign” otherness.

The poems we have traced thus far would seem to demonstrate the singularity of Dickinson’s queenly being. But in her Susan-centered poems, when she invokes this figure, it is

often in the form of shared, or mutual sovereignties, from a distance at times temporal and often geographical. One poem in particular suggests that her “queenly” persona is not only attached to the “foreign” but also to her bond with another woman. Some Dickinson critics have suggested that the poem is about Susan.²² This poem, dated by R.W. Franklin to have been written in 1863, places the “queenly” space of erotic female friendship in the irretrievable past. The first stanza subverts traditional, legal marriage rites:

Ourselves were wed one summer - dear -
Your Vision - was in June -
And when Your little Lifetime failed,
I wearied - too - of mine -

They were once “wed,” Dickinson suggests. But this is not a traditional marriage between man and wife. It is fleeting (“one summer”), between women, largely in the imagination, and yet vital, life-sustaining. Their separation is depicted as a form of death (“Your little Lifetime failed”)—a death that allows, as the final stanza suggests, Susan’s new life to bloom, while Dickinson’s remains threatened:

’Tis true, Your Garden led the Bloom,
For mine - in Frosts - was sown -
And yet, one Summer, we were Queens -
But You - were crowned in June –

(F596)

If they were *once* queens, only Susan may be now, according to this melancholic poem. But Susan is a queen only in the sense of the power she attains from her marriage to a man, her socially-endorsed sense of identity within a rather conventional nuclear family structure, “crowned in June” by a wedding veil.

In another well-known poem, which R.W. Franklin dates to 1861, one that the poet sent to Susan in the mid-1860s according to Hart and Smith, Dickinson echoes a similar sentiment, exploring the fraught nature of her desire for queenly sovereignty in relation to heterosexual marriage:

Title divine, is mine.
The Wife without
the Sign –
Acute Degree
Conferred on Me –
Empress of Calvary –
Royal, all but the
Crown –
Bethrothed, without
the Swoon
God gives us Women –
When You hold
Garnet to Garnet –
Gold – to Gold –
Born – Bridalled –

Shrouded –

In a Day –

Tri Victory –

“My Husband” –

Women say

Stroking the Melody –

Is this the Way –

Emily –

(*OMC* 120)

This poem is perhaps Dickinson’s strongest and most complex performance of her queenly persona, made all the more complex by her having sent the poem—by itself—to her sister-by-marriage. Indeed, she earns her “Title” not by marriage nor by any “Sign,” but by a contract that transcends the prescriptiveness of law.²³ Her marriage is a “Divine” one, but it is also deeply painful; she is the “Empress of Calvary,” whose royalty is inextricable from the loss and mourning “Conferred on [her],” making that royalty possible. Indeed the poet’s subject feels as though she cannot properly, legally, divinely, count amongst those called “Women”: “God gives us Women -/ When You hold/ Garnet to Garnet -/ Gold – to Gold -.” The “us” that suggests the subject counts herself among a community immediately turns to a “you,” suggesting her separation or even removal. But with this loss the subject enjoys a kind of freedom. “Born – Bridalled -/ Shrouded -/ In a Day” she writes in lines that brilliantly convey what J.J. Halberstam has called the “logic of reproductive temporality” in which “respectability, and notions of the normal on which they depend” compel people to enter into (hetero-)normative life schedules, of

which marriage is most certainly included (*In a Queer Time and Place* 4). In Dickinson's lines, this life schedule is condensed into a single day.

"Tri Victory," she calls it, in a line we can't help but sense is dripping with irony, as it follows pronouncements of queenliness fraught with threat of loss: for her, the loss of the woman to be married, and for the other, the threat of a "Shrouded" life. If marriage is an achievement, it is a remarkably unstable one. The performative utterance, "My husband," is a "Melody" that may be stroked, but the poem ends, in the voice of these imagined women, in the form of a question without a question mark: "Is this the way –." Have we performed the role properly? Indeed, is this even possible? The poem ends by hanging onto this question, refusing conclusiveness but nonetheless making available unspoken alternatives. As Betsy Erkkila argues, "In their separation from each other, Dickinson suggests, both have lost some of the potency of their primal bond together when they were 'Queens' under another law. And, thus, the 'crown' of power that Sue receives as the Bride of Christ and man is also the crown of limits, blows, and thorns" ("Homoeroticism" 170). If neither form of queenliness offered in the poem quite satisfies the speaker's desires for identity and erotic possibility, nevertheless, a handful of Dickinson's poetry to Susan suggests what those unspoken alternatives might be, even as they take place on an impossible, imagined landscape. In the last section of this chapter, I will trace the imagined Latin American landscape onto which Dickinson projected her queenly desires for "another law."

"A Different Peru": Dickinson's Royal Space

That Distance was between Us

That is not of Mile or Main –

The Will it is that situates –

Equator – never can –

(F906)

Many of Dickinson's biographers have maintained that after Susan's 1856 marriage to Dickinson's brother Austin, the relationship between the two women fundamentally changed. In these accounts, though Austin and Susan moved next door to the Dickinson homestead, and though Susan remained Dickinson's most constant literary interlocutor, the letter-poems that Dickinson sent to her began to be "marked on one side by [Dickinson's] desire, on the other by [Susan's] distance, highness, aloofness." This "distant nearness," Alfred Habegger has suggested, was important for Dickinson's literary production, but was also notable for its familiar Dickinsonian theme: "always seeking intimacy and finding it withheld" (367-69). Reading Dickinson's queer Latin American letter-poems to Susan, however, may compel us to reevaluate this consensus. In these works, we see Dickinson eroticizing distance rather than lamenting it; we see her incorporating violence and pain into pleasure.

As we have seen, Dickinson often figures the space of the home—the domestic sphere which is also the domestic *national* sphere—as a space in which she often feels "homeless," even "foreign." Thus, she often performs a poetic self in expressly "foreign" terms. In an attempt to articulate a notion of sovereignty independent of, or less tethered to, the often constricting binaries of both public and private, domestic and foreign, she adopts the persona of a "queen" who is simultaneously ruler of her imagined landscape and foreign to the double sense of the domestic. This section argues that, more often than any other global locale, Dickinson projected her desires for intimacy with Susan onto Latin America. Her romantic and exoticizing depictions

project a space of erotic belonging that Dickinson ultimately finds impossible to sustain in her time and place.

Why, we might ask, does Dickinson focus on Latin America? In some ways, highly specific answers to this question may continue to elude us. But we may begin to answer this question by surveying what evidence we have that Dickinson would have been aware of some of the political and metaphorical implications of her Latin American imagery. Judith Farr has noted that Dickinson's fascination with Latin America—specifically South America—was not just her own. “The image of Latin America—particularly Brazil,” she writes, “was proposed in nineteenth-century literate discourse as a contemporary Eden, while the word ‘Eden’ itself was widely used to describe the superb scenery of its tropical ‘paradise’” (153). This discourse was shared by “the geologists, horticulturalists, anthropologists, poets, and artists of her time” (153). As I argued in Chapter One, “Eden” carried with it the racialized trope of primitivism—not just in imaginations of the indigenous peoples in the “West” but in imaginations of Latin America as well. This tropical paradise, this return to innocent origins, this space in which she and Susan might be alone in their love and their mutual sovereign rule: this was Emily Dickinson's South American “Eden.”²⁴

In addition to this Edenic discourse among New England's intellectual elite, the U.S.-Mexican War is one of a handful of national political events that Dickinson explicitly refers to in her letters. Though it occurred relatively early in her life, Dickinson made use of its meanings—both personal and national. This war represented an important moment in the hotly contested demarcation of U.S. national space, which exacerbated regional political tensions within the U.S., particularly on the subject of slavery.²⁵

In 1847, during her time at Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, Dickinson wrote an affectionate letter to her brother Austin, thanking him for his recent visit, and simultaneously confirming and denying her own homesickness: “I had a great mind to be homesick after you went home, but I concluded not to, & therefore gave up all homesick feelings. Was not that a wise determination? How have you all been at home since last week?” (*Letters* 16). From here the letter leads to goings on about the Seminary, and finally to a dream in which “Father had failed” and the family would have to have their “rye field mortgaged to Seth Nims,” a “loco.” The letter then turns to national matters:

Wont you please to tell me when you answer my letter who the candidate for President is? I have been trying to find out ever since I came here & have not yet succeeded. I dont know anything more about affairs in the world, than if I was in a trance, & you must imagine with all your “Sophomoric discernment,” that it is but little & very faint. Has the Mexican war terminated yet & how? Are we beat? Do you know of any nation about to besiege South Hadley? If so, do inform me of it, for I would be glad of a chance to escape, if we are to be stormed. I suppose Miss Lyon. would furnish us all with daggers & order us to fight for our lives, in case such perils should befall us. (16)

Despite its somewhat light, even comical tone, this passage is dense with political meanings, both personal and national. The young Dickinson complains that her stay at the Seminary has isolated her from national news, news she presumably would have followed had she been home. She also links concerns with national space to concerns of regional sovereignty, albeit in a comical mode: “Do you know of any nation about to besiege South Hadley?” Each of the issues she brings up (the Dickinson family finances, the President, the Mexican War, New England)

are, in fact, related. On this passage, Erkkila notes, “many New Englanders saw [the Mexican War] as an imperialist land grab aimed at extending slavery and the ‘Slave Power,’ and the presidential campaign... would result in the election of Zachary Taylor and a major Whig victory in 1848” (“Art of Politics” 141-2). (The Dickinson family, it should be noted, was a politically active one, and staunch supporters of the Whig party.) Erkkila concludes that “Dickinson’s letter mocks the politics of manifest destiny and President Polk’s expansionist ambition to annex Mexico; it also registers a more local Whig fear that New England itself was under siege, not by the republic of Mexico, but by the nationalist, imperialist, and proslavery forces of Polk and the Democrats” (142).²⁶ While Erkkila’s analysis does much to illuminate Dickinson’s political-mindedness (which I do not question), it understates the rhetorical effects of Dickinson’s letter. The parallel that Dickinson draws by moving from fear of national expansionist policies (that she perhaps presumes may not directly affect her), to a nightmare fantasy (even if it is a joke) of her Seminary being besieged, may be a rhetorical act of identification with national others, via the thicket of political discourse. The extension of slave power into Mexican territory, she seems to suggest, would result in its extension into New England and introduce political anarchy into the comforts of the white Massachusetts bourgeoisie. Her persistent use of questions is also important, reproducing the sense of homelessness with which she begins her letter. Taken together, these rhetorical gestures suggest that Dickinson perhaps cares less about the “fact” of political problems than the effect that asking political questions might produce—that is, the bond she shares with her brother, a bond she sustains through a shared political language.

If Dickinson shared a political language with her brother in their mutual knowledge of political news, they also shared a family library, which housed two wildly popular historical works by William H. Prescott, *The History of the Conquest of Mexico* (1843) and *The History of*

the Conquest of Peru (1847).²⁷ Before turning to Dickinson's own poetry, it is necessary to briefly examine these works, because they are crucial for understanding both her Latin American images and their ideological and erotic weight. As their titles make explicit, the book traces a history of the Incan empire and its subsequent Spanish conquest. In its preface to *Conquest of Peru*, for example, Prescott implies that he will structure his narrative in such a way that resembles narratives of U.S. "manifest destiny": "In the march of events, all moves steadily forward to this consummation. It is a magnificent epic, in which the unity of interest is complete" (3). Prescott frames his narrative as one of inevitable progress, a teleological design of which "civilization" is the endpoint and the imperial conquests of the "barbaric" are the necessary means.

In the first chapter of his history, Prescott establishes his narrative in a similarly teleological fashion, though he also draws on nineteenth-century evolutionary theories of human development in doing so. Comparing Mexico—the subject of his previous and even more popular history—and Peru, "the two [nations] most advanced in power and refinement," he writes:

[Though] resembling one another in extent of civilization, they differed widely as to the nature of it; and the philosophical student of his species may feel a natural curiosity to trace the different steps by which these two nations strove to emerge from the state of barbarism, and place themselves on a higher point in the scale of humanity. (35)

In this account, these (homogenous) nations share a singular (imperialist) goal: their civilization's "advancement" on a global, hierarchized scale predicated upon their own purported

technological and ideological superiority. And at the end of his narrative, Prescott makes a telling comparison between the Incan empire and the United States:

It is not easy to comprehend the genius and full import of institutions so opposite to those of our own free republic, where every man, however humble his condition, may aspire to the highest honors of the state,--may select his own career, and carve out his fortune in his own way; where the light of knowledge, instead of being concentrated on a chosen few, is shed abroad like the light of day, and suffered to fall equally on the poor and the rich; where the collision of man with man wakens a generous emulation that calls out latent talent and tasks the energies to the utmost; where consciousness of independence gives a feeling of self-reliance unknown to the timid subjects of despotism; where, in short, the government is made for man,--not as in Peru, where man seemed to be made for government. The New World is the theatre in which these two political systems, so opposite in character, have been carried into operation. The empire of the Incas has passed away and left no trace. The other great experiment is still going on,--the experiment which is to solve the problem, so long contested in the Old World, of the capacity of man for self-government. Alas for humanity, if it should fail! (174)

The “opposite” forms of government, in Prescott’s account, are monarchy and democracy. In his estimation, monarchy necessarily fails in a teleological narrative that places democracy as the necessary historical endpoint for civilization, in which “every man” has a “feeling of self-reliance” because “government is made for man” and not vice versa. In this democratic fantasy,

Prescott's gendered universal is, of course, not merely stylistic. "Alas for humanity, if it should fail!" he exclaims; indeed, for Dickinson, it had failed her. The promise of "self-reliance," of being-for-oneself, of political and bodily sovereignty, was (and remains) a white male myth of "ideal" citizenship from which women were institutionally and ordinarily excluded. Thus, the construction of her queenly persona is a rejection of a popular democratic ethos and its contradictions; thus, she identifies with a certain anti-democraticism; and thus, she looks to other, "exotic" lands in which she might re-imagine a form of feminine self-sovereignty. To do this, Dickinson draws on *Conquest of Peru*, invoking its images but re-shaping its narrative in gendered terms.

Dickinson's poems and letters include at least twenty-six references to Latin America.²⁸ In what follows, I trace the threads of meaning that link these poems, letters, and letter-poems. While I do not offer full readings of all of them, I will pay particular attention to those that highlight most clearly what I'm calling her lavender Latin Americanism. Finally, I will argue that the letter-poems addressed directly to Susan highlight this trend most clearly and profoundly.

In poem 875, a poem that Dickinson uncharacteristically seems to title, "Purple –," she begins, "The Color of a Queen, is this -." If her act of titling is uncharacteristic, her association of the color purple to royalty, and indeed her queenly persona, is characteristic of her royal imagery. Significantly, Dickinson specifically identifies the color with Peru in poem 266, "What would I give to see his face?," among others. In this poem, the subject asks rhetorically what she would give to see a man (the poem importantly does not specify whether this man is a beloved) and lists a number of riches she has stored with which she would be willing to part; she ends that list, "And Purple – from Peru –" (line 20). As Rebecca Patterson writes, "Peru is purple because

it is her royal color, evoking the classic tradition of royal purple and signifying power—the power of emperors, queens, great conquistadores, great wealth. And of course Peru is wealth” (*Imagery* 142). Furthermore, she writes, “Not only ‘Peru’ and ‘Buenos Ayres’ but indeed all South America, the Caribbean, Mexico, and Central America are embedded in this matrix of symbols signifying incalculable wealth or unattainable desire” (143). If these spaces connote wealth and unattainable desire, in her letter-poems to Susan, they come to represent a very specific form of desire, one that Patterson is particularly attuned to but did not explicitly associate with Dickinson’s Latin Americanism: homoeroticism between two women.

An important feature, and an importantly related one, that characterizes Dickinson’s Latin American poems is their merging of violence with eroticism. This merge is not uncommon in Dickinson’s work, but its frequent occurrence in her “tropical” landscapes has begun to garner critical attention for its political and historical significance. In an early, much discussed poem, “Flowers – Well – If anybody” (Fr95), Dickinson’s final stanza connects a “purple line” not to Peru but to “St Domingo” in the Dominican Republic:

Too much pathos in their faces
For a simple breast like mine –
Butterflies from St Domingo
Cruising round the purple line –
Have a system of aesthetics –
Far superior to mine.

(lines 9-14)

Rebecca Patterson writes of this passage, “This is a quite early poem, and the butterflies seem to have no special symbolic importance, though the ‘purple line’ is her equator of the heart, her

code sign of the emotional tropics” (145). I agree with her reading of the significance of the “purple line,” though it does not offer, to my estimation, a substantial enough explanation of Dickinson’s reference specifically to “St Domingo”; furthermore, her dismissal of the symbolic importance of the butterflies here on the grounds of this being “a quite early poem” is suspect; and finally, Patterson’s own evocative phrase, “equator of the heart,” deserves more analysis than her account offers. Ed Folsom and Kenneth Price have shown that Dickinson’s references to “Domingo” carry with them the cultural memory of the “bloody slave revolt there that ushered in the nineteenth century and that stood for over half a century as an object lesson of what could happen in North America.” In their analysis of a different poem (Fr1064), they argue that the image of a “berry of Domingo” “conjures up an image of blood and slave revolt” in contrast to more conventional readings of the poem that “see ‘Domingo’ here as one of Dickinson’s ‘exotics,’ a word that simply creates an aura of jungle heat and savage desire” (“San Domingo”).

These two readings—erotic desire and bloody violence—need not be mutually exclusive; nor is “jungle heat and savage desire” a simple matter, given these tropes’ intimate ties to literatures of Western colonialism.²⁹ “Domingo,” but also the various other South American locations to which Dickinson refers, carry both the weight of violence and the weight of sexual exoticization. If the poem about which Folsom and Price write indeed explores themes of appetite and unsatisfied desire, be it emancipation or sexual consummation or both, we might read these “butterflies” (whose “system of aesthetics –” Dickinson imagines, are “Far superior to mine”) as figures whose freedom to cruise about contrast them with her poetic “I”: she begins her poem, “Flowers – Well – if anybody/ Can the ecstasy define.” The intimate relation between butterflies and flowers, then, allow butterflies an intimate relation with, knowledge of, “ecstasy,” a knowledge from which Dickinson’s “I” is kept. Returning to Patterson’s evocative phrase,

“equator of the heart,” I suggest that for Dickinson, Latin America represented both the potential for erotic satisfaction, the potential for violent upheaval, as well as their ultimate unattainability.

Each of her references to Peru either address Susan directly, or indirectly in their associations with envy, loss, and conquest. In a letter-poem dated by Hart and Smith around 1876 or later, she writes to Susan:

Susan—I dreamed
of you, last
night, and send
a Carnation to
indorse it—
Sister of Ophir—
Ah Peru—
Subtle the Sum
That purchase
you— (*OMC* 207)

Here, she evokes religious imagery to describe their “sisterhood.” According to the *Emily Dickinson Lexicon*, “Ophir” refers to “King Solomon’s mines...a source for gold for the temple of Jerusalem”; and interestingly, the *Lexicon* also suggests that “possibly,” it refers to “the rich natural resources of South America.” Dickinson gives religious weight to their relationship in her address, but she also suggests an initially ambiguous relation between herself and Susan: are they both sisters of Ophir, or is only Susan? The “Ah” in the following line, and her address to Susan as “Peru” herself, also invites an ambiguous reading: is this “Ah” a sigh of pleasure or a sigh of

melancholy? Or both? Peru's connection to Ophir, here, suggests, of course, that Peru connotes wealth. And while Ophir might not refer to unattainable desire, its shift in address as Peru certainly does as Dickinson mourns the "subtlety" with which one might "purchase" Susan. The means by which Dickinson might do so remain a mystery to her. In Dickinson's language of economic exchange she figures both Susan and the landscape of Peru as a site of extractable wealth, even as they remain elsewhere and unattainable.

While Susan is figured here as Peru, a foreign land that holds vast riches, in her other Peruvian poems, Dickinson identifies with—but ultimately cannot hope to be—the masculine conquistador. In a nuanced treatment of Dickinson's correspondence, Marietta Messmer has traced the significance of the gendered dimensions of the poet's various personae. In the case of Dickinson's relationship with Susan, she argues that one of Dickinson's strategies to maintain a love relationship with Susan after her marriage to Austin was to "reconstruct it on an idealized, fictional level" (92). In her Latin American poems, this reconstruction yielded the conquistador persona. In two of her poems, she invokes Francisco Pizarro, who led his Spanish army to what was then the Incan Empire in order to obtain their vast riches and settle Spanish territory. Patterson suggests that "[the] tale of a golden hoard wrenched from the Incas by the bold conquistadores was the property of every imaginative schoolboy" (142). If I hesitate to attribute such ubiquity to this mythologized history, I am convinced of Dickinson's knowledge of such accounts based on her reading and revising of Prescott's narratives in her poetry.

Dickinson often playfully subverts these familiar narratives by framing her Latin American poems in conventionally masculinist terms but twisting the expected identifications of the poem's subject. For example, in poem F368, "I envy Seas, whereon He rides -," in which she seems to envy an unspecific distant land and the adventure it promises for its proximity to an

unspecific “He.” Upon first reading, this might seem to be a standard-fare imperialist romantic narrative that, in mid- to late-nineteenth century American novels “created cognitive and libidinal maps of the world on which they projected fantasies of unlimited expansion...[enlisting] American women as spectators of the imperial project” (Kaplan 20). To explain, a first reading might suggest that Dickinson is the “wife at home” who waits for her beloved to return both to their domestic home and their domestic nation; that her longing for their reunion is a longing to maintain the domestic sphere even as his “adventures” abroad are necessary to a nation-building project. But the poem takes a stark turn at the end of the third stanza of this six-stanza verse.

I envy Nests of Sparrows –
That dot His distant Eaves;
The wealthy Fly, upon His pane –
The happy – happy Leaves –

That just abroad His Window
Have Summer’s leave to play –
The Ear Rings of Pizarro
Could not obtain for me –

(lines 9-16)

It no longer the proximity to this “He” about which she writes that she envies; it is the leaves’ “leave to play,” their very “abroad”-ness (recall the “butterflies of St Domingo” who cruise “around the purple line”). The riches plundered from the Incan empire (“The Ear Rings of Pizarro”) hold little value to her. She continues:

I envy Light – that wakes Him –
And Bells – that boldly ring
To tell Him it is Noon, abroad –
Myself – be Noon to Him –

(lines 17-20)

“Noon” and “abroad” here are intimately connected, and she wishes that she, “Myself,” were “abroad.”

Pizarro, then, is less associated with gain than with loss, the desire to be elsewhere. This is even clearer in an earlier poem, poem 136, one which Dickinson sent to Susan in either the late 1850s:

Who never lost, is
unprepared
A Coronet - to find.
Who never thirsted,
Flagons, and Cooling Tamarind.
Who never climbed the
weary league –
Can such a foot Explore
The purple Territories
On Pizarro's shore?
How many legions overcome –
The Emperor will say?
How many *Colors* taken

On Revolution Day?
How many Bullets bearest?
Hast Thou the Royal Scar!
Angels! Mark “Promoted”
On this soldier’s brow!

(*OMC 46*)

Peru is a conquered land here (“Pizarro’s shore”) but it is only attainable by the experience of loss. That loss gains one a “Coronet,” a crown, recalling Dickinson’s connections between “queenliness” and Peru, which is further designated as royal by its label as “The Purple territories.” This crown, this royalty, this sovereignty, is only available to those who have experienced great loss, great pain, and have the battle scars to prove it. And although the poem’s subject answers to an “Emperor,” her title (if we may allude to a poem we’ve discussed earlier) is divinely ordained. She is simultaneously soldier, queen, and divine entity; she—not alone but with others who have “earned” it—lays claim to her Edenic Peru. Her invocation of an ambiguous “Revolution Day” also links the shared histories (about which she knew) of political revolution in the western hemisphere: Mexico, Peru, “Domingo,” and the U.S., blurring nationalist distinctions and re-framing sovereignty in transnational—even global—terms.

And not least importantly, she re-frames sovereignty in affective terms. In another poem that Dickinson sent to Susan, in 1863, she invokes Bolivia; this poem also returns us to meditations on the self, interiority, and self-sufficiency—in short, sovereignty:

Reverse cannot befall
That fine Prosperity
Whose Sources are interior -

As soon - Adversity

A Diamond - overtake

In far - Bolivian Ground -

Misfortune hath no implement

Could mar it - if it found -

(F565)³⁰

The first stanza would seem to suggest that those for whom “Prosperity” is “interior” are protected from “Adversity.” But its fourth line invites another reading: “As soon,” I want to suggest, invites a comparison between “Adversity” and the “Diamond.” If that diamond represents those interior sources, it might represent wealth (and perhaps royalty) it might also “overtake.” If she is the diamond, she may not be “marred” by others, but she may be “found,” and subsequently sold, traded, owned. If being owned is not, in the poem, a complete “Reverse,” it is its own kind of destruction.

Protection from that destruction depends not only on the poet’s interior resources but also on a precarious relationality. Dickinson explores that relationality in another Bolivian poem, sent to Susan in the late 1860s:

A Mine there is

no Man would Own

But must be

conferred,

Demearing by

Exclusive Wealth

A Universe beside –

Potosi never to
be spent
But hoarded in
the Mind
What Misers
wring Their
hands Tonight
For Indies in
the Ground!

Emily ’

(*OMC* 132)

The Bolivian city of Potosí, along with the East “Indies,” represent wealth here: the wealth of the “Mind” which is also a “Mine.” If that wealth is “Exclusive,” the poem’s subject suggests, it demeans—it *de-means*. Individualism, intellectual or economic, is insufficient, leaving an entire “Universe beside.” But it is also a self-protective gesture, allowing “no Man” nor “Misers” to lay claim to the subject’s foreign wealth, her wealth that is her foreignness. This wealth must be “conferred,” an active decision invoked in the passive voice, suggesting that this conferral moves beyond economic individual agency—perhaps into a realm of mutual sovereignties.

If this desire for mutual sovereignties was always a fraught one, no poem of Dickinson’s exemplifies that tenuousness more than poem F418. More commonly referred to as “Your Riches taught me poverty,” this poem has received much attention in feminist Dickinson scholarship,

but rarely for its Latin Americanist “lavender” tinge. In this poem, themes of foreignness, queenliness, and Susan-as-Latin America-as-loss converge in their sharpest relief. It is a long poem, so I pull from the first two stanzas here:

Your Riches –
taught me – Poverty!
Myself, a “Millionaire”
In little – wealths - as
Girls can boast -
Till broad as “Buenos Ayre” –
You drifted your Dominions –
A Different Peru –
And I esteemed - all –
poverty -
For Life’s Estate - with you!

Of “Mines” – I little know –
my self –
But just the names – of Gems –
The Colors – of the
Commonest –
And scarce of Diadems –
So much – that did
I meet the Queen –

Her glory – I should know –
But this – must be
a different Wealth –
To miss it – beggars – so!

(lines 1-23)

The letter begins, “Dear Sue,” and the poem immediately follows. At the poem’s end, Dickinson merely writes:

Dear Sue –
You see I remember –
Emily.

(*OMC* 70)

In this letter-poem, sent in the early 1860s, Dickinson recalls a time in their youth when she felt herself “a Millionaire/ In little wealths.” Riches, again, become a symbol of loss rather than of gain, of the unattainability of what was once attainable.³¹ “Peru” becomes “Different” because Susan “drifted” her “Dominions.” If “Peru,” then, is “their” dominion, that different one, as many biographers have shown, was her marriage to Austin. By figuring that “different” “Dominion” as a marriage, Dickinson returns us to our earlier discussion pertaining to the double meaning of home—both the domestic sphere and the nation-state. This “drifting” of Susan’s, suggesting a separation from “their” “Dominion” no longer makes Susan the “Peru” of queenly love, but something “different.” If she does not have access to the “Mines” of Susan’s mind, what access she does have to her are “just the names – of Gems –”: shared language and the exchange it might engender. Susan’s position as a “Queen” might allow such an exchange; “Her glory -,” she writes, “I should know -.” As Erkkila writes of this poem, “For all Dickinson’s

dream of female oneness and possession under another law, Sue remained, finally, other” (“Homoeroticism” 176). The “wealth” they might have shared seems, ultimately, to elude her. But if her desire for mutual sovereignty with Susan never fully came to fruition, that desire nevertheless gestures toward a political and erotic otherwise less sutured to her political and erotic present. What she knew of Latin America she gathered in rather disparate ways in order to articulate her discontent and her desires—desires beyond the nation, desires beyond the world of female “romantic friendship.” In her exoticization of Latin America, she both adopts the language of U.S. imperial expansion and deploys that language to reflect on her relationship with Susan within the confines of the familiar, the domestic. The Latin American spaces rendered in these poems are fantasies of exotic distance and sometimes conquest, to be sure; but they are also re-imaginings of what political and erotic being might be for women living in mid- to late-nineteenth-century Amherst.

Chapter Three
The South Seas in San Francisco:
Charles Warren Stoddard's Domestic Spheres

In February 1867, Walt Whitman received a letter from Charles Warren Stoddard, in which the twenty-three-year-old writer asked for his autograph, professed his “hearo-worship,” and included a handful of poems soon to be published that year (*Walt Whitman Archive*). Whitman did not respond. Undeterred, Stoddard sent another letter two years later, from Honolulu, imploring him for a response by returning the elder poet’s own yearning lines back to him: “Stranger! if you, passing, meet me, and desire to speak to me, why should you not speak to me? And why should I not speak to you?” (*Walt Whitman Archive*).¹ Beginning his letter with these lines, Stoddard signaled an affinity and affiliation that transcended the literary, infusing his letter with the eroticism of a Whitman text. Alluding to his previous letter, Stoddard wrote, “I am the stranger who, passing, desires to speak to you. Once before I have done so offering you a few feeble verses. I don’t wonder you did not reply to them. Now my voice is stronger. I ask—why will you not speak to me?” (*Walt Whitman Archive*). Stoddard’s letter continues, “So fortunate as to be travelling in these very interesting Islands I have done wonders in my intercourse with these natives. For the first time I act as my nature prompts me. It would not answer in America, as a general principle,—not even in California, where men are tolerably bold. This is my mode of life” (*Walt Whitman Archive*). More confident this time, Stoddard inhabits the eroticized persona of a Whitmanian “stranger,” performing the role of the reader who has realized Whitman’s vision of democratic adhesiveness, the reader who has answered Whitman’s call.²

But, as his letter indicates, Stoddard would attempt this utopic self-fashioning on a vastly different landscape, a different “frontier,” than the queer West that Whitman had poetically projected in the 1860 *Leaves*. As I argued in Chapter One, it was in this edition where Whitman

most explicitly and emphatically pronounces the democratic possibilities of an expansive, queer erotics—an expansiveness inextricable from national expansionism. If Whitman privileged the American frontier as the primary site in which male-male intimacy and eroticism would engender a truly “native American,” Stoddard largely dis-identified with American culture and looked toward the Pacific in search of uninhibited sexual expression. The “Islands” to which Stoddard refers were the “Sandwich Islands,” what would later be called the Hawaiian Islands. These, and later Tahiti, would come to constitute Stoddard’s queer “South Seas.”

To this second letter Whitman did respond. “I cordially accept your appreciation, & reciprocate your friendship,” Whitman wrote. “Those tender & primitive personal relations away off there in the Pacific Islands, as described by you, touched me deeply” (*Correspondence* 81-82). Sensing in Whitman a bond of comradeship in primitivism, Stoddard sent a final letter in 1870, this time despairing in San Francisco, again invoking Whitman’s own art: “In the name of Calamus listen to me!” (*Walt Whitman Archive*):

I wrote you last from the Sandwich Islands. I shall before long be even further from you than ever, for I think of sailing towards Tahiti in about five weeks. I know there is but one hope for me. I must get in amongst people who are not afraid of instincts and who scorn hypocrisy [sic]. I am numbed with the frigid manners of the Christians; barbarism has given me the fullest joy of my life and I long to return to it and be satisfied. May I not send you a proze [sic] *idyl* wherein I confess how dear it is to me? (*Walt Whitman Archive*)

Desperate to escape the shadows of civilization, Stoddard imagines that the Tahitians with whom he will “intercourse” enjoy, rather than fear, “instincts”; he imagines that Tahiti will offer fleshly “barbarism” without “frigid manners.” As proof of the pleasures of such “barbarism,” Stoddard

enclosed “A South Sea Idyl,” sketch that he would publish in the *Overland Monthly* in September that year.

Whitman read the sketch, and apparently adored it. He replied affectionately, but with a caveat:

...I have just re-read the sweet story [“A South-Sea Idyl”] all over, & find it indeed soothing & nourishing after its kind, like the atmosphere. As to you, I do not of course object to your emotional & adhesive nature, & the outlet thereof, but warmly approve them—but do you know (perhaps you do,) how the hard, pungent, gritty, worldly experiences & qualities in American practical life, also serve? how they prevent extravagant sentimentalism? & how they are not without their own great value & even joy? (*Correspondence* 97)

It was Stoddard, this time, who did not respond.

The exchange between Whitman and this now-little-known writer offers us one of many examples of how Whitman’s sexual poetics in some ways facilitated and shaped a burgeoning social network of “adhesive” men in the mid- to late-nineteenth century. But perhaps what is most interesting for the purposes of this dissertation is Whitman and Stoddard’s *shared* language of the “primitive” to describe their erotic lives and practices, and their *divergence* in geographically locating where those desires might be satiated. Both figure those locations at the border of American empire, but their understanding of that border’s location differed vastly.

Stoddard felt, as he confided to Whitman, that while in California “men are tolerably bold,” they were not nearly as bold as his “mode of life” necessitated (*Walt Whitman Archive*). Roughly three years before sending Whitman the first letter of their exchange, while attending Brayton Academy in Oakland, California during the 1863-1864 school year, the young Stoddard

suffered from mental distress. As Ben Tarnoff writes, “School had become a daily nightmare of fear and humiliation...By the end of the semester he was a ‘nervous wreck,’ he wrote. Brayton Academy had broken him” (84-5). In August 1864 his physician suggested that he travel to Hawaii for a six-month recovery. He had family friends there, and he had been enchanted by the South Seas adventure stories of Daniel Defoe, Herman Melville, and Captains David Porter and James Cook.³ And so began his lifelong romance with the South Pacific and their male inhabitants, producing work that would lead William Dean Howells to pronounce, “[No] one need ever write about the South Seas again” (*SSI* vi).⁴ In the Hawaiian Islands and Tahiti, Stoddard discovered (or at least imagined) a mode of life he felt to be unsustainable on the American landscape, which had seemed to promise such possibilities for Whitman. Stoddard’s entire literary career might be characterized as a testament to those possibilities.

In the above exchange, as he does time and time again in his letters and his literary works, Stoddard deploys the language of the “natural”—as well as the figure of the “native”—to describe himself and his erotic desire for men. Indeed same-sex desire, along with his Catholicism and his love of the tropical South Seas, are the major themes that unify his eclectic oeuvre. And each of these themes influenced his notion of the “natural.” “I am what I was when I was born,” Stoddard told Jack London late in his life (qtd in Crowley xxvi). He was referring to his sexual desire for men in terms we might describe as “essentialist,” but it was influenced less by notions of biological determinism than by the belief that if God created him in his image, then his desires must be good (or, at the very least, forgivable).⁵ So, too, was it influenced by the discourse of primitivism that endowed a kind of moral innocence to “savages,” toward whom he felt erotic desire and with whom he felt a sense of affiliation. In “Chumming With a Savage,” a sketch we will explore below, after coming upon “a glorious valley, inhabited by a mild, half

civilized people,” the narrator yearns to “stop and be natural” (SSI 19). “To be natural” was less a code for homosexual sex (though it certainly included that) than a name for a state of being: unencumbered by “civilization” and moral codes, fluid, flexible, and free.

Stoddard wrote and published rather prolifically throughout his lifetime (1843-1909), to some—though never satisfactory—acclaim. He would, with a few exceptions, all but disappear in the annals of U.S. literary history until the proliferation of “recovery” projects in gay and lesbian studies inside and outside the academy in the 1970s and ’80s.⁶ As a young man he published poetry—first under the pseudonym Pip Pepperpod, then under his own name—and had gained a reputation as the “Boy Poet of San Francisco” and a member of the “Bohemian” circle of writers, which included Mark Twain, Ina Coolbrith, and Bret Harte (Crowley xxvi); he then turned to semi-autobiographical, semi-fictional travel sketches in his most popular work, *South-Sea Idyls* (1873); over the next thirty years, he continued to travel and to write, publishing more sketches as well as accounts of famous Catholic figures; and in the first decade of the twentieth century and the last decade of his life, he produced a deeply strange—many critics have simply said “bad”—novel, *For the Pleasure of His Company* (1903).⁷ Describing male same-sex physical intimacy with surprising explicitness, his works offer queer critics valuable insights into the multitudinous ways in which rapidly changing concepts of sexuality were understood and negotiated by men whose erotic desires and activity were primarily focused on men. More than that, though, because he locates his homo-utopia in the South Seas, his works compel us to continue to trace the relationship between shifting discourses of sexuality and U.S. imperial presence abroad through the turn of the twentieth century when that shift arguably reached its most fecund point.

Tracking Stoddard's work chronologically, from early poems published in 1867 and 1869 to the 1873 travel-sketch collection *South-Sea Idyls* and finally to the 1903 novel *For the Pleasure of His Company*, we see his quasi-autobiographical persona move from an expansive poetics to narratives of contraction. As his work's settings move from U.S. colonies in the South Pacific to San Francisco, an urban center in the U.S. interior, we see Stoddard negotiating changing understandings of the interrelated issues of male same-sex eroticism, colonial relations, and racialization. This chapter argues that Stoddard's merging of the seemingly contradictory discourses of "the natural" and "the domestic" allowed him to imagine modes of sexual sociality that complicate the boundary between "sodomite" and "homosexual," to invoke Michel Foucault's much-debated formulation (*History of Sexuality* 43). However, while "the natural" allowed Stoddard the relative freedom and fluidity some queer historians have come to associate with pre-identitarian discourses of sexuality, I also argue that this freedom, accessed primarily through colonistic tourism, depended on the objectification of "native" male objects of desire, whom he imagines as relics of a prelapsarian past.

I explore this dynamic primarily through his depictions of domestic settings: not only what occurs in those habitations but how they are described in both physical and affective terms. As I argued in Chapter Two, alongside discourses of sexuality and national geography, discourses of domesticity also saw rapid change in the late-nineteenth-century U.S. Stoddard, like Dickinson, deploys the domestic as symbolic of home and nation. Unlike Dickinson, however, he reconfigures it to imagine erotic, quasi-familial relationships with young men, adapting patriarchal models to suit his queer couplings. Over time, Stoddard's works gradually evince less stable relationships to home and place.⁸ That instability derived *both* from the privilege of mobility (generally but not exclusively reserved for white men) *and* the initial

stirrings of modern homophobia. This process of domestic destabilization reveals the racial and imperial underpinnings of early twentieth-century sexual binaries and homophobias. In Stoddard's early work, the site of the male homosocial domestic names a space of hierarchical power in which Stoddard's "I" enjoys patriarchal authority, unencumbered movement, and homoerotic pleasures to consume and to enjoy. In his last major work, the 1904 novel *For the Pleasure of His Company*, however, domestic space—both home and nation—become spheres of containment, isolation, and paranoia, features of what would come to be called "the closet" in the twentieth century.

Most critical assessments of Stoddard have focused on the politics of his plots, as well as his fetishization of and sometimes-identification with the "native boys" that populate his writings. But I contend that Stoddard's literary contraction of *space* over the course of his career illuminates how the colonial, racialized policing of "perversity" in the nineteenth-century South Pacific arrives in the metropolises of the early-twentieth-century U.S. to inform the policing of "perversity" of white queer subjects. Tracing the gradual contraction and de-naturalization of domestic space through three important texts across Stoddard's oeuvre, we see the diminishment of sexual freedoms alongside the advent of modern sexual definition.⁹ However, we also see how those freedoms were initially enabled by the U.S. colonial presence in the South Pacific. To whom, we might ask, were those imaginative futures available? On what lands, on what peoples, did those futures depend?

Utopia and Colonial Domesticity in the Early Poetry (1867-69)

While Stoddard's poetry did not initially elicit a response from Whitman, it did find one from another writer whom he admired greatly: Herman Melville. Unlike Whitman, Melville

shared with Stoddard a passion for the South Pacific; like Whitman, he must have sensed the currents of male homoeroticism flowing at the surface of Stoddard's poetry.¹⁰ Melville's response included both praise and denigration: "I have read with much pleasure the printed Verses you sent me, and, among others, was quite struck with the little effusion, 'Cherries and Grapes.' I do not wonder that you found no traces of me at the Hawaiian Islands" (*Letters* 227-28).¹¹ Despite, apparently, Melville not having left a trace of himself, the homoeroticism many have identified in Melville's "South Seas" novels can be felt in the poetry he arguably inspired.¹²

One of Stoddard's more palpably erotic poems and the one poem Melville mentioned specifically and diminutively, "Cherries and Grapes" is an early case in point of Stoddard's racialized, sexualized vision of an Edenic utopia:

Not the cherries' nerveless flesh,
However fair, however fresh,
May ever hope my love to win
For Ethiope blood and satin skin.

Their lustre rich, and deep their dye,
Yet under all their splendors lie—
To what I cannot tribute grant—
Their hateful hearts of adamant.

I love the amber globes that hold
That dead-delicious wine of gold;
A thousand torrid suns distill

Such liquors as those flagons fill.

Yet tropic gales with souls of musk

Should steep my grapes in steams of dusk;

An orient Eden nothing lacks

To spice their purple silken sacks.

(*Poems* 73)

Opening the first stanza with “Not,” the speaker pits cherries and grapes against one another, passively fighting for his desire to consume them, his “love to win,” romanticizing and eroticizing both the act of the speaker’s eating and the fruit’s desire to be eaten. Opening the poem with a familiar racial trope of the hot-blooded Ethiopian in his description of cherries, he surprisingly describes their “flesh” as “nerveless” and “fair,” associating a lack of sensuality with lightness in shade. The poem’s immediate “Not” instantly rejects them, despite the “Ethiope blood and satin skin” that he prizes. Anthropomorphizing these cherries while highlighting their “blood” and “skin,” he simultaneously anatomizes, biologizes, and sensualizes: they are the African object for the poet’s, poem’s, and reader’s consumption. And yet, he rejects them when compared to the Orientalized grapes, locating utopia (“An orient Eden”) in their “purple silken sacks.” Following the erotic tone of the poem’s previous stanzas, this description suggests a metaphoric relation to testicles; taken further, “That dead-delicious wine of gold” might be read as the seminal stuff contained within those sacks, suggesting both its intoxicating potential and its potential to induce *la petite mort*, further homoeroticizing this, in Melville’s words, “little effusion.” (Of course, some readers attuned to the eroticism of the poem might also have interpreted the fruit, feminized as they are, as “female” figures, stereotyped as the “hot-blooded”

and the “cool” woman. However, the slipperiness of Stoddard’s gendering points us toward a larger issue: the feminization of bodies racialized as non-white, regardless of gender.) If we extend this metaphor to the purview of poetic inspiration, as the last stanza suggests we do, we might recall Roland Barthes’s famous invocation of *la petite mort* in *The Pleasure of the Text*: moments of *jouissance* in which the reader (or in Stoddard’s case, the writer) loses oneself in the pleasures of reading (or, again, writing). Like Barthes—and like Emily Dickinson for that matter, who occasionally invoked such feelings in the language of “drunkenness”—for Stoddard’s speaker the capacity to be intoxicated by an “Other” enables the poet to reach his highest imaginative potential, in turn engendering orgasmic *jouissance*.

As bell hooks argues in “Eating the Other,” “It is precisely that longing for *the pleasure*”—what we might call *jouissance*—“that has led the white west to sustain a romantic fantasy of the ‘primitive’ and the concrete search for a real primitive paradise, whether that location be a country or a body, a dark continent or dark flesh, perceived as the perfect embodiment of that possibility” (27). Indeed, Orientalizing these grapes, Stoddard racially and geographically “otherizes” them as well. Without “hateful hearts of adamant” (perhaps linked to the racist fear of African violence) the grapes are more easily consumable, more susceptible to the poet’s oral and alimentary pleasures—more docile, more feminine perhaps. While the physicality of these fruits is rendered in rich, even penetrative detail, the speaker only addresses (implicitly) his mouth. Thus disembodied, the speaker imagines he may move freely from “Orient” to “Ethiopia”; he is free to consume both fruits and the places in which they may have been produced. If utopia depends upon the consumption of potentially intoxicating tropical climes and grapevines (“dead-delicious wines of gold”), rendered in terms of racialized bodies, that consumption also depends upon a specifically colonial relation to space. The poem’s speaker

assumes—through the poem’s very form of address—its own centrality, its own “here-ness.” Racialized by its distance and distanced by its racialization, the fruit is positioned within a geography that locates whiteness as its invisible center.¹³

Stoddard’s seemingly bizarre racialization of these fruits indexes what Kyla Wazana Tompkins argues in her important book, *Racial Indigestion*, “that eating is central to the performative production of raced and gendered bodies in the nineteenth century” (7). When the poet imagines himself as a mouth with an infinite capacity to consume, he renders himself a “subject” different than the “contained autonomous self—the ‘free’ Liberal self” who is imagined as always already white and male (3). His consumption goes beyond conspicuousness. Consuming these racialized bodies—racialized as “Ethiope” and “oriental”—he revels in the pleasures of his own permeability, revels in the idea of the racialized other becoming part of him. As much as we can see in the poem how “eating functions as a metalanguage for genital pleasure and sexual desire,” one cannot ignore how the poet’s erotic fantasy is also a violent, cannibalistic one (9). While Vincent Woodard has shown how interracial homosexuality under U.S. slavery also produced the white, cannibalistic fetishization of the “delectable negro,” Stoddard’s poem reveals that a similar dynamic took place under colonial conditions.

While Stoddard invokes an “Orient” utopia in this early poem, he makes it his primary subject in another he did *not* send to Melville, entitled, appropriately, “Utopia.” This 1869 poem, published in the *Overland Monthly*, deploys an almost Melvillian juxtaposition of generic forms and begins with what appear to be stage directions: “*Scene: Moku, in the South Sea*” (*Poems* 54). It announces the poem’s players: “The Poet under his vine and fig-tree. Piolani, his ‘Man Friday,’ in attendance)” (54). By setting such a stage, Stoddard highlights the central importance of space—visualized, perhaps even directed—in his particular poetical rendering of this pastoral

yet future-oriented utopia. However, the speaker also highlights what makes this “utopia” possible: possession and ownership. The vine and fig-tree are “his”; so, too, is “his ‘Man Friday.’” Twice we move from specificity to generality: Moku (a generic Hawaiian word for “island”) imaginatively expands into the South Sea, and Piolani the character becomes his Man Friday the literary trope—a trope that announces themes of colonialism, racial subjugation, cannibalism, and conversion. A Crusoe-ian figure, Stoddard’s quasi-autobiographical poet summons the specter of U.S. racial slavery, suggesting without confronting the relationship between propertied domesticity and racialized labor.¹⁴ While Piolani’s relationship with the Poet is somewhat ambiguous (it is not clear whether he is a servant, a slave, or a domestic companion) the evident power dynamics throughout (Poet as subject/Piolani as object, Poet as propertied/Piolani as domestic laborer) highlight the ways in which the important differences between those positions nonetheless depend on similar gender and racial hierarchies.¹⁵ Piolani is consumable, erotically and economically, and the poem functions parasitically, draining both labor and meaning from him. In this imagined idyllic domestic space, his labor produces the conditions for the poem’s presence, and the poem effectively evacuates Piolani’s subjectivity.

The poem’s sense of place frequently fluctuates between exotic, eroticized “nature” and the serene space of the Poet’s home. This utopia is no untrammelled frontier, no tabula rasa onto which the poet might project his erotic fantasies. It is a rather quiet, rather conventional domestic setting, albeit in a tropical locale: “A Cottage on a cliff” whose doors and windows open from a “wind, with fragrant whiff.” Much of the poem is rather humdrum; the poet addresses Piolani, asking him to complete minor tasks of domestic drudgery, keeping house so as to permit the poet time and space to produce poetic thought. We hear the poet ask Piolani “to slide/wine-jar or a calabash/ Close against the window-sash”; and later, “Piolani, take the broom./ Chase that lizard

from the room./ There's another on the wall!/ How the slimy creatures crawl/ Over everything and all." The poet's achievement of domestic bliss, the poem stresses, depends upon Piolani's labor—labor that is simultaneously invoked, justified, and obscured by his designation as "Man Friday."

Piolani is not only a man-servant but the poet's muse and love-object. The domestic drudgery of the poem's first stanza contrasts to its second, which first eroticizes the nature that surrounds their cottage. Imagining an erotic union between sea and land, the poet writes, "With her song so bland./ By the cocoas in the sand./ Singing in her siren's voice./ The sea leans on the land." He describes this "hour," the early evening, "tawny," a liminal state linking temporal in-betweenness with racial ambiguity. Extending the erotic metaphor, he notes "the stars begin to flower" while "day is pleading./With those heavy drooping lids./And a glance of love exceeding./For one moment more of power." So, too, are animals of various sorts eroticized; he hears "crickets, katydids," "butterflies," "fowls of every feather" and "moths and insects of all breeding/ Upon one another feeding." We see once more the link between eroticism and "feeding," linked as it is through its rhyme with "breeding." In the midst of this orgiastic scene are the poet and Piolani, strongly suggesting an erotic relationship, rendered as "natural" as night and day. The domestic and the natural are not pitted against one another here but infused; the erotics of this domestic scene are continuous rather than antithetical to the loud orgy of their natural surroundings.

In the stanza that follows, the Poet asks Piolani a series of hypothetical questions (hypothetical because here the subaltern indeed cannot speak) intended to emphasize their cultural differences but also to advocate a relativist notion of those differences. The binaries are in keeping with the racist tropes common in the nineteenth century U.S. and persistent in the

present: science/superstition, white/brown, Christian/pagan. After a long while, these questions are interrupted: “Kill that scudding centipede/In the corner on the floor!” This, then, is followed by: “Would you land upon our shore/And destroy our too frail hopes?” This moment of interruption, immediately followed by the Poet’s continued questioning, once again calls attention to the labor necessary to maintain this erotic bliss. But this time it links that labor to the history of colonization—the fetishized (in this poem explicitly eroticized) moment of contact between land and shore, “civilization” and “savage”—here embodied in a “scudding centipede.”

What then follows is the pivotal moment of homoeroticism in the poem:

Piolani, if you like,
Having brought my coffee in,
Strip your body to the skin,
Don’t imagine you will strike
Consternation to this breast.
Thus it was we found you drest,
Nature in this case knew best.
Take your little Idol down;
Cold and stony, rude and brown,
Eyeless, earless, noseless too,
But it’s all the same to you.
Nor foot, nor hand in any part,
Utterly devoid of art,
But a comfort to your heart.
Fall before it as of old,

Sing your *melis* manifold.
Burn the boughs of resinous trees,
Solemn incantations blending
With the savory smoke ascending.
Prone upon your hands and knees,
Care not that a stranger sees;
Be a savage as you please.
Be not watchful nor alert,
Nor regard with eye suspicious
Any matter I assert.
Do not try with surreptitious
Spell my spirit to convert.
Union we can scarce expect—
Let our hearts our ways direct—
I will call you some new sect.

After Piolani performs his domestic duty, the poet bids him to disrobe, focusing on and fetishizing his skin. Again this recalls for the poet a formulaic moment of colonial conquest: “Thus it was *we* found you drest,” the poet writes. This domestic scene previously seems only to be populated by the Poet and Piolani; the Poet, we learn, did not come here alone, did not come here without being implicated within larger colonial dynamics.

This stanza comes in the form of demands: undress, worship your idol, regard nothing and no one else. Piolani, as addressee, does not act but is rather frozen in time in and through the poetic address. Eroticizing Piolani’s form of “savage” worship, the poet compels him to do so

“as you please” without regard for any “stranger.” However, he qualifies this bidding with regard to himself: “Be not watchful nor alert./ Nor regard with eye suspicious/ Any matter I assert.” Distinguishing himself from “strangers” and yet suggesting that he shares with them a gaze that Piolani might “regard with eye suspicious,” the poet seems to fancy himself as both Piolani’s compatriot of the natural and as a beneficiary of what Eng-Beng Lim calls the “white man/native boy dyad,” the erotic configuration of Anglo-European colonial white man and the young (or, if not, treated as such), nubile, feminized “brown boy” (4,7).¹⁶

This dyad, as it functions in Stoddard’s early utopian poetry, is dependent on an assumption of uninhibited movement and an endless capacity to consume both geographies and bodies. This poetry attempts to expand the domestic sphere, merging nature and interior space in order to make a place for male-male intimacy that is simultaneously erotic, familial, and ultimately exploitative: a place that depends upon the domestic and erotic labor of the “native boy” Piolani and the Poet’s un-interrogated consumption and ownership of land. In the next section, we move to Stoddard’s most popular work to show how the fixity of place evident in “Cherries and Grapes” and “Utopia” slips into more ambivalent, unstable geographies of desire.

“Chumming With a Savage” (1873) and the Ambivalent Domestic

In the second letter that Stoddard sent to Whitman, Stoddard describes an erotic encounter with a “native boy,” an encounter that inspired the first sketch in arguably his most famous work, a collection of loosely autobiographical travel-sketches entitled *South-Sea Idyls*. In a long passage perhaps intended to titillate his respondent, Stoddard recounts a particularly memorable “intercourse” (his phrase that connotes not only interpersonal relations but also national and sexual ones) with a native boy:¹⁷

I mark one, a lad of eighteen or twenty years, who is regarding me. I call him to me, ask his name, giving mine in return. He speaks it over and over, manipulating my body unconsciously, as it were, with bountiful and unconstrained love. I go to his grass house, eat with him his simple food, sleep with him upon his mats, and at night sometimes waken to find him watching me with earnest, patient looks, his arm over my breast and around me. In the morning he hates to have me go. I hate as much to leave him. Over and over I think of him as I travel: he doubtless recalls me sometimes, perhaps wishes me back with him. We were known to one another perhaps twelve hours. Yet I cannot forget him. Everything that pertains to him now interests me. (*Walt Whitman Archive*)

Written in prose that sounds downright Whitmanian, this brief erotic encounter, with its bodily manipulation, “unconstrained love,” and lingering gazes, would become “A South Sea Idyl,” the sketch I alluded to in this chapter’s introduction. That sketch would in turn become “Chumming With a Savage,” the longest—and arguably central—sketch in *South-Sea Idyls*. It is a remarkably explicit passage, and no less explicit in its published forms. But what is perhaps just as queer, just as remarkable as its unabashed rendering of male-male sensuality is the way that it works within conceptual frameworks quite familiar to the “civilization” Stoddard so fervently desired to escape: “I go to his grass house, eat with him his simple food, sleep with him upon his mats, and at night sometimes waken to find him watching me with earnest, patient looks, his arm over my breast and around me. In the morning he hates to have me go. I hate as much to leave him.” Here he merges the accouterments of the nineteenth-century bourgeois domesticity with primitivist details that suggest his ambivalent identification with that ideology. But Stoddard’s pining for the young boy after having parted ways also suggests an ambivalent tone that would

characterize the fictionalized account of this encounter. If the boy's hut offers a home away from the United States, it is only a temporary one. Neither wants this domestic, blissful moment to end, and yet it must; separated by geography, they are nonetheless united in their impossible desire to be united (at least in Stoddard's imagination).

Whether by titillation, a sense of affiliation, or both, Stoddard's letter received an enthusiastic response. "I cordially accept your appreciation, & reciprocate your friendship," Whitman tells him. "I do not write many letters, but like to meet people. Those tender & primitive relations away off there in the Pacific Islands, as described by you, touched me deeply" (*Correspondence* 81-82). In this response, Whitman follows Stoddard in coupling the "tender" and the "primitive," locating that coupling not on U.S. soil but "away off there." Whitman was not merely being agreeable. Horace Traubel reports him stating, "He [Stoddard] is right: occidental people, for the most part, would not only not understand but would likewise condemn the sort of the thing about which Stoddard centers his letter" (Traubel 269). In this instance, rather than reproductively merging "civilization" and "savagery," as he does so often in his poetic works, Whitman pits "occident" against "orient," and unfavorably so.

In *South-Sea Idyls*, a collection of travel sketches that was his most commercially successful work, Stoddard (or Stoddard's narrator—he blurs this distinction frequently) continues to pine for a space in which the domestic and the natural merge to the point that those realms are indistinguishable and inextricably bound—and importantly divorced from the "unnatural" influences of "civilization."¹⁸ In this work we begin to see Stoddard strike a more ambivalent key. While critics have to some extent taken Stoddard at his word that this text presents an Edenic Oceania unfettered by contact with "civilization," I suggest instead that *South-Sea Idyls* evinces a yearning for such a space but an acknowledgment of its impossibility,

an acknowledgment that this utopia exists merely in the abstract fantasy of fetishistic tourism, an acknowledgment that these fantasies depend upon violent colonial power dynamics.¹⁹ Of the nineteen total sketches Stoddard includes in *South-Sea Idyls*, the three-part “Chumming With a Savage” illustrates this yearning and this impossibility most strikingly. It tells the story of a Stoddard-like narrator’s amorous encounter with a young islander boy named Kaná-aná, and the narrator’s prodigal-son-like return to the U.S. Though the location of Kaná-aná’s village is unspecified in the text, Roger Austen suggests that the sketch is based loosely on Stoddard’s 1869 visit to Molokai (Austen 59). Missing Kaná-aná upon his return, he enlists the Colonel of the Royal Guards to kidnap him and bring him to San Francisco. There he attempts to “civilize” him unsuccessfully and eventually returns him home. Returning to Kaná-aná’s village later, he discovers that the boy’s time in the U.S. has incapacitated him to live as he once did, and that he has tragically died. In Molokai, as we will see, this sketch depicts domestic scenes as crucial sites in which familial discourses are negotiated or even transformed by their permeability within their exotic surroundings. But as the protagonist and Kaná-aná move to the U.S. and back, domestication becomes a process of colonial violence, as the seemingly mundane processes of “civilization” render native lives unlivable. Ultimately, in these domestic spaces, Stoddard’s fantasies of “the natural,” which here and previously he saturated with eroticism, cannot be divorced from that colonial violence.

Jeffrey Geiger argues in an astute reading of *South-Sea Idyls* that while “Stoddard’s homoerotic descriptions tend to be organized around the pleasures of scopophilia,” the collection also “[posits] looks that are enacted between—rather than merely at—men: glances that are furtively cast and then returned, glances that appear to circulate.” However, even as these “looks” might work to de-naturalize simplistic notions of the racialized power dynamics of

colonial objectification, Geiger is careful to make central that these looks “take place within the colonial context” and “are effectively complicit in emerging forms of sex tourism” (36). I extend the spatial implications of his readings of Stoddard’s scopophilia to the domain of the domestic. While he points to colonial ambivalence in *South-Sea Idyls*, that ambivalence occurs primarily in those texts that evince persistent *domestic* instability—and this is no clearer than in “Chumming With a Savage.”

The sketch begins with a conflict between “civilization” and “savagery,” and the result is domestic bliss. After the narrator and a doctor—presumably an Anglo-European but described twice by the narrator, counterintuitively, as “savage”—encounter “a glorious valley, inhabited by a mild, half civilized people, who seemed to love me at first sight” (*SSI* 18-19). He tells us, “I wanted to stop and be natural; but the Doctor thought otherwise of my intentions” (19). We are never told what that “otherwise” might mean, though it seems to imply immorality of a vague nature. The narrator meets a sixteen-year-old boy, described first by his clothing, introducing the scopophilia to which Geiger attends: “I saw a straw hat, bound with wreaths of fern and *maile*; under it a snow-white garment, rather short all around, low in the neck, and with no sleeves whatever./ There was no sex to that garment; it was the spontaneous offspring of a scant material and a large necessity. I’d seen plenty of that sort of thing, but never upon a model like this, so entirely tropical—almost Oriental” (20). The reader peers, with Stoddard, at the border between skin and cloth. He then moves to a physical description of the boy: “I saw a round, full, rather girlish face; lips ripe and expressive but not quite so sensual as those of most of his race...The smile which presently transfigured his face was of the nature that flatters you into submission against your will” (21). Feminized by Stoddard’s description of his “girlish face,” the (thus far

nameless) boy nonetheless possesses power over the narrator, flattering him “into submission against [his] will.”

However, there are limits to the extent to which the boy might subject the narrator to his will. Immediately the boy proposes a domestic arrangement, placing his hands on the narrator’s knees and declaring, ““I was his best friend and he was mine; I must come at once to his house, and there live always with him”” (*SSI* 21). Retaining first person narration while using a direct quotation, Stoddard (whether intentionally or not) makes clear that it is his voice, and not the boy’s, who constructs this narrative. The narrator attaches this domestic arrangement to an escape from “civilization”: “Thereupon I renounced all the follies of this world, actually hating civilization, and feeling entirely above the formalities of society. I resolved on the spot to be a barbarian, and, perhaps, dwell forever and ever in this secluded spot” (24). Escaping from civilization, he imagines himself to escape time, content to dwell in stasis “forever and ever.” When they enter Kána-aná’s home (which is described alternately as a hut and a house), the narrator is “taken in, fed, and petted in every possible way, and finally put to bed, where Kána-aná monopolized me, growling in true savage fashion if any one came near me” (24). In addition to Kaná-aná’s description as a kind of erotic capitalist who “monopolizes” the narrator, he is also described in animalistic terms—“growling” and, later, “hugging me like a young bear” (24). So, too, does the narrator “animalize” himself, describing being “taken in, fed, and petted” like a domesticated animal. Immediately the sketch merges the homoerotic, the “natural,” and the domestic; it sets a scene of homoerotic bliss in “this secluded spot,” this safe haven from “the follies of this world” and “the formalities of society.”

Continuing to describe this erotic scene in the language of food consumption, Stoddard characterizes the space itself as such: “The heavy beams of the house were of some rare wood,

which, being polished, looked like colossal sticks of peanut candy” (SSI 25). “I thought how strangely I was situated: alone in the wilderness, among barbarians,” Stoddard’s narrator writes (24). He follows this statement with a detailed description of the hut’s interior, to which he gives a great deal of attention. He begins with a description of the bed: “well stocked with pillows or cushions of various sizes, covered with bright-colored chintz, [the bed] was hung about with numerous shawls, so that I might be dreadfully modest behind them” (24-25). Following this description with a joke about modesty, Stoddard calls attention to the relationship between physical space and sexual moralism, inviting readers to share his sense of moral relativism and unashamedly imagine what lies behind those “numerous shawls.” “The rest of the house—all in one room, as usual—was covered with mats, on which various recumbent forms and several individual snores betrayed the proximity of Kána-aná’s relatives. How queer the whole atmosphere of the place was!” (25). Untouched by Victorian pruderies or religious assumptions about the sanctity of the conjugal, reproductive couple, Kána-aná’s family embraces the stranger, and invites them into their “queer” home, supposedly outside of the time of civilization. Almost immediately, however, we sense that this idyllic domesticity is in fact *not* untouched by civilization. “O, that bed!” the narrator exclaims, “It might have come from England in the Elizabethan era and been wrecked off the coast; hence the mystery of its presence. It was big enough for a Mormon” (25). In a bizarre conflation of Elizabethan Englishness and nineteenth-century American religion Stoddard renders the bed’s presence a “mystery,” a manifestation of the liminal space between the colonial and the natural.²⁰

Nonetheless, on this bed, in this domestic space, Stoddard “goes natural”: “If it is a question how long a man may withstand the seductions of nature, and the consolations and conveniences of the state of nature, I have solved it in one case; for I was as natural as possible

in about three days” (SSI 28). Facetiously playing the role of the scientific observer, Stoddard’s narrator experiences “the natural”—eroticized by its characterization as seductive—through the language of *process*, rather than through the language of identity. With the narrator having “gone natural,” for a while afterwards, the narrative hangs suspended; little happens but repetitious accounts of sensuous pleasures in the bed: “Again and again he would come with a delicious banana to the bed where I was lying, and insist upon my gorging myself, when I had but barely recovered from a late orgie of fruit, flesh, or fowl. He would mesmerize me into a most refreshing sleep with a prolonged and pleasing manipulation. It was a reminiscence of the baths of Stamboul not to be withstood” (32). Here, as we saw earlier in Stoddard’s poetry, the racialized eroticization of “the natural” takes the form of the excessive consumption of exotic “fruit, flesh, or fowl.” “Gorging” himself, the narrator becomes animalistic in this “orgie” of alimentary pleasure. Not divorcing these pleasures from the realm outside the hut, however, he maps these pleasures onto the homosocial spaces of the “baths of Stamboul” in a kind of Orientalist metonymy.

Eventually, however, the narrator expresses his heretofore unspoken attachments to the United States, attachments rendered in the language of temporality. “Hour by hour I was beginning to realize one of the inevitable results of time” (SSI 32), the narrator states, citing the wearing out of his boots as his (rather dubious) reason to return to “civilization”—a kind of opposite to “the call of the wild.” Part One of the sketch ends in a prodigal son narrative heretofore unaddressed. Stoddard seems to attach the patriarchal, biological family, introduced through the figure of the father and no one else, to the confines of civilization. And yet he does not beg his father for forgiveness but rather professes his love for “that dear little velvet-skinned, coffee-colored Kána-aná” who “above all others, and more than any one else ever can...loved

your Prodigal” (35). Thus, Part One ends in the key of ambivalent domesticity, with the narrator torn between two distant, irreconcilable homes.

The rest of the tale charts his repeated failures toward that seemingly impossible reconciliation. Part Two, entitled “How I Converted My Cannibal,” begins with the narrator’s decision to forcibly bring Kána-aná to the U.S. in order to “civilize” him—to make him assimilate to the home the narrator seems unable to escape. Divorced from the natural, the domestic becomes a space of containment for the narrator (he finds himself “growing as practical and prosy as ever” and “[awakening] no kindred chord in the family bosom”) and this state is predictably even worse for Kána-aná (*SSI* 36). Outside of the Edenic South Pacific, early on the narrator cruelly states, “He wasn’t half so interesting up here anyhow! I seemed to have been regarding him through chromatic glasses, which glasses being suddenly removed, I found a dark-skinned savage, whose clothes fitted him horribly and appeared to have no business there” (38). The narrator, in short, adopts the very colonialist binary of civilization and savagery he had earlier denounced. Invoking the Christian discourse of conversion, though never attempting such religious conversion, Stoddard assumes a conventional dichotomy of saved and unsaved, civilized and savage, in his melancholic descriptions of his failed attempts to make a home for himself and Kána-aná. This project is doomed, it seems, from the start. When they come across a painting of a tropical sunset, and it arrests Kána-aná in rapt attention, the narrator realizes Kána-aná’s sense of homelessness and his desire to return to his native island: “Here was the valley of his birth,” he writes, naturalizing the relationship between the biological and the domestic in ways that he had previously de-naturalized. These contradictory constructions continue to reveal Stoddard’s emerging sense of ambivalence about the possibilities of feeling at home or the possibilities of forming new ones.

That naturalization is further emphasized in the tragic third act, after which Stoddard has paternalistically and reluctantly allowed Kána-aná to return home. He foreshadows this tragedy in Part Two when he states in an aside, “I have transplanted a flower from the hot sand of the Orient to the hard clay of our more material world—a flower too fragile to be handled, if never so kindly” (*SSI* 43-44). Rooting Kána-aná to his original home—in the language of Orientalism no less—he suggests that the United States-as-home cannot sustain the growth of certain subjects/bodies. Part Two ends with another foreshadowing, another invocation of biological paternity: “As the foam of the sea you love, as the fragrance of the flower you worship, shall your precious body be wasted, and your untrammelled soul pass to the realms of your fathers!” (47). Connecting—even fusing—Kána-aná to the sea, flowers, and biological lines, Stoddard spells his doom in his contact with “material” civilization.

In Part Three, the narrator, once again discontent with the “civilization” of the U.S., returns to “his” beloved island. There he repeats that the “barbarians” he meets “hate civilization almost as much as I do, and are certainly quite as idolatrous and indolent as I ever aspire to be” (*SSI* 54). This time it is in the language of comparison rather than affiliation, establishing a distance he later clarifies; seeing naked natives wade in the ocean water, he states, “I’d done the same thing often enough myself, when I was young, and free, and innocent, and savage” (54). No longer suspended in time, marked and marred by the civilization to which he returned and could never really escape, he longer shares this behavior, this process of “becoming natural.” After a while, he pursues Kána-aná. He discovers that the boy has died; his age, “16 yrs,” is inscribed in his epitaph (63). Here, Kána-aná is marked by the linear time of “civilization”—time the imposition of which the narrator presents as the inevitable result of the dying out not just of Kána-aná but of his people more generally. At the tale’s end, after the narrator has conveniently

absolved himself of Kána-aná's death, he hears a disembodied voice crying, "Behold my fated race! Our days our numbered!" (69). The invocation of numbers eerily echoes the "16 yrs" inscribed on Kána-aná's grave. While "that spirit of the air sang the death-song of his tribe," the narrator writes, he says to himself, "My asylum is the great world; my refuge is in oblivion" (69).²¹ In this parallel, Stoddard returns to feelings of affinity with Kána-aná's people; their deaths presage his own oblivion, his homelessness. Nonetheless, he conceives of this affiliation in the rhetoric of inevitable decline and decay that would be deployed to justify the colonial presence of the United States in the South Pacific—colonialism whose sexualized rhetoric of native "savagery" would haunt his autobiographical San Francisco novel, *For the Pleasure of His Company*.

***For the Pleasure of His Company* (1903): Colonialism and the Closet**

Thirty years after the first publication of *South-Sea Idyls*, Stoddard published *For the Pleasure of His Company*, another quasi-autobiographical work but in the form of a novel. In the interim, he had traveled to England accompanying Mark Twain on his book tour; then to Italy where he stayed at some length with the artist and writer Frank Millet in Venice; then to the Holy Land, Suez, and Egypt, until his return to California in 1878. In three years he returned to Hawaii, after which he had taken up invitations to lecture first at Notre Dame University then at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. During this time, he continued to travel and published several works: more travel sketches as well as studies of Catholic figures (most notably Father Damien and his missionary work with the "lepers of Molokai"). In 1901 he was informed that his teaching position at the Catholic University would be terminated in 1902.²² One year later, he published his San Francisco novel.

If the domestic constitutes an ambivalent and unstable spatial category in that earlier work, Stoddard's first and only novel posits something more sinister: impossibility. The novel has been criticized on aesthetic grounds for its plotlessness, its artlessness, and its purported purposelessness.²³ Even upon its first publication, in an *Overland Monthly* review entitled "A Story Without a Plot," the novel was criticized thusly: "There is no ease of diction nor is there a convincing excuse for telling the tale at all. The action is tedious, lagging, it does not give the impression of inevitableness, nor of sincerity" (qtd in Austen 149). Roger Austen, following Stoddard's contemporary critics, calls the novel a "failure, mainly because of its obliquity" (146). In a slightly more charitable assessment, Thomas Yingling calls it "quite awkward as a narrative; there is no hermeneutic dimension to it—no mystery or promise revealed or withheld" (91).

Rather than totally dispose of the question of its aesthetic merits, I want to reframe the question of the novel's temporal failures—the lack of a logical sequence of events, the lack of character development—to ask how the protagonist's relation to domestic space becomes, by the novel's end, unsustainable and uninhabitable.²⁴ The gradual contraction of these spaces, I suggest, suffocates the protagonist's action, until its fantastical, *deus ex machina*-like denouement: Paul Clitheroe's escape from civilization in a canoe with three naked South Pacific islanders who appear, like magic, in the middle of the night: "Old friends these, pals in the past, young chiefs from an island he had loved and mourned" (*Pleasure* 188). The plot, if there can be said to be one, follows the perpetual bachelor-poet-drifter Clitheroe's perpetual failures to find a proper trade (he tries writing, acting, and finally seeks "final refuge in the most picturesque and poetical of monasteries"); a sustained relationship with men or women (though any sexual interest in women is pretty summarily swatted down by the narrator); and a sense of feeling at

home (117). Indeed, the very “English-ness” of his name foregrounds his permanent homelessness in the U.S. In other words, he fails to develop according to what we have come to call heteronormative life scripts.²⁵ He, and the plot, hang suspended. In terms of queer literary history, many of its features may be readily identifiable. As Yingling puts it, “the familiar codes are there: Aestheticism, effeminacy, intense passion for male friends, an inexact and unfocused ennui, hypersensitivity, arguments against the primacy and legitimacy awarded heterosexual romance, vague allegations of scandalous behavior” (91). What marks this text as distinct from some of the early-twentieth-century works that share these features, however, is that this coding does not perform the work of concealment but rather renders concealment as a hyper-visible thematic.²⁶ Concealment and the failure to develop create a palpable sense of constriction, manifested in Paul Clitheroe’s actions (or non-action) and the novel’s form itself.

For the Pleasure of His Company, published on the cusp of the solidification of sexual self-definition in the United States, renders visible that “the closet” (as well as a notion of sexual subjectivity) emerges out of a colonial history—in this case, the history of U.S. presence in the South Pacific. In this case, “the closet” to which I refer is what Eve Sedgwick has described as “the relation of the known and the unknown, the explicit and the inexplicit around homo/heterosexual definition” (3).²⁷ This relation might be said to be the novel’s central preoccupation, even as it works to evade answers or moments of revelation; but as its drama unfolds, “the primitive” and its colonial legacy is peculiarly ever-present when the novel explores this theme. Precisely because the novel has a white male protagonist at its center, and because its world seems relatively unconcerned or even oblivious to the processes and effects of racial and colonial discourse, we are able to see the ways in which those discourses become naturalized for the novel’s San Franciscan characters (though not invisible through the prism of

its omniscient narrator) at the turn of the twentieth century. Clitheroe's consistent transpacific (understood as transracial) affiliations signal, however amorphously, queer affinities and feelings of homelessness.

If earlier critics dismissed the novel on aesthetic grounds, Christopher Looby has recently reassessed its "failures"—incohesive narrative, flat characterization—as rich territory to historicize the queerness of Stoddard's text. He suggests that the novel's tripartite structure, in which sections temporally overlap in sometimes dizzying ways, indicates Stoddard's conscious attempt to aestheticize his refusal for heteronormative plot structures; furthermore, he argues that this structure aestheticizes the ways in which its central character can—indeed must—simultaneously inhabit distinct worlds: the worlds of Paul Clitheroe (the title of Book First), Miss Juno (Book Second), and Little Mama (Book Third). But, whereas Looby sees in this structure a conscious refusal on Stoddard's part of both heteronormativity and taxonomies of sexual deviance, I read his treatment of Clitheroe in less radical, more ambivalent terms.²⁸ To be sure, the novel resists sexual taxonomization—in the name, as I have been arguing, of the natural. However, it is not true that the narrator or the protagonist resist all "normative" desires in the name of radical queer refusal; the novel's central source of melancholy is Clitheroe's unfluctuating feelings of being "homeless at home," to invoke domestic dissident Emily Dickinson (F1603).²⁹

"In most cases," the narrator informs us early in the novel, matter-of-factly, "a single room takes on the character of the one who inhabits it...[Turn] a man loose in a room, and leave him to himself for a season, and he will have made of that room a witness strong enough to condemn or condone him on the Last Day; the whole character of the place will gradually change until it has become an index to the man's nature" (*Pleasure* 19). In this pronouncement, the

narrator offers a way of reading both the novel and Clitheroe: if the novel lacks a traditional plot structure and Clitheroe lacks psychological depth (both features have been noted practically universally by critics), we might instead follow this narrator and read the spaces he occupies and the surface indices of his character. The novel's opening sequence—a long, plotless, sensual description of the exterior and interior of Clitheroe's abode, an apartment he rents from the landlady of a dilapidated mansion—suggests as much. At the beginning of *For the Pleasure of His Company*, we are situated in San Francisco in a cramped bachelor pad. The mansion is covered by ivy vines: “ivy vines sheltered it like a dense thatch; ivy vines clung fast to a deep bay window that nearly filled one side of the library of the old mansion, now a living room; ivy vines curtained the glazed wall of a conservatory where some one slept as in a bower” (16). These ivy vines suggest a few things: first the mansion's dilapidation and its inhabitants' refusal to “modernize,” second as a means of obscuring its interior life from the outside world, and finally as an indicator of Clitheroe's attachment to “the natural.” This sentence's syntactical parallelism emphasizes the ivy's all-encompassing character of the ivy vines, which we learn not only cover the mansion's exterior but its interior as well: “There were vines creeping everywhere within the room, from jars that stood on brackets and made hanging gardens of themselves,” the narrator writes of Clitheroe's abode. “[Creepers], yards in length, that sprung from the mouths of water-pots hidden behind objects of interest, and these framed the pictures in living green; a huge wide-mouthed vase stood in the bay window filled with a great pulu fern still nourished by its native soil—a veritable tropic island this, now basking in the moonlight far from its native clime” (17-18). Covering the walls and objects of the apartment, they signal its inhabitant's desire to “make natural” his domestic space, centralized on the figure of the “great pulu fern,” a

native Hawaiian plant transplanted to this San Francisco room. So, too, do the protagonist's possessions signal such a desire:

Heaped in corners, and upon the tops of the book-shelves lay bric-a-brac in hopeless confusion; toy canoes from Kamchatka and the Southern seas; wooden masks from the burial places of the Alaskan Indians and the Theban Tombs of the Nile Kings; rude fish-hooks that had been dropped in the coral seas; sharks' teeth; and the strong beak of an albatross whose webbed feet were tobacco pouches and whose hollow wing-bones were the long-jointed stem of a pipe; spears and war-clubs were there, brought from the gleaming shores of reef-girdled islands; a Florentine lamp; a roll of papyrus; an idol from Easter Island, the eyes of which were two missionary shirt buttons of mother-of-pearl, of the Puritan type; your practical cannibal, having eaten his missionary, spits out the shirt buttons to be used as the eyes which see not; carved gourds were there, and calabashes; Mexican pottery; and some of the latest Pompeiian antiquities such as are miraculously discovered in the presence of the amazed and delighted tourist who secretly purchases the same for considerably more than a song. (17)

In this long, almost Jamesian sentence, the narrator voyeuristically eyes each exotic object; he "reads" them, imagining (without knowing) their lives before becoming bric-a-brac.³⁰ The sentence deploys a syntax of accumulation: item by item, each becomes one part of a whole sentence and a whole room. And with each geographical referent—Kamchatka, the Southern Seas, Alaska, Egypt, Florence, Easter Island, Mexico, and Pompeii—the narrator expands the scope of Clitheroe's mobility, accumulating lands in the construction of his character.

Accumulating, that is, through (perhaps morally questionable) economic consumption, as the last

image of the “amazed and delighted tourist who *secretly* purchases” Pompeiian antiquities (emphasis mine). In a strange aside, we learn that some of these objects are marked by colonial contact, as “an idol from Easter Island, the eyes of which were two missionary shirt buttons of mother-of-pearl, of the Puritan type” makes legible a past colonial encounter (and the religio-cultural mixture it engenders) that the passage as a whole might be said to obscure. Following this, the narrator pauses to interject, “your practical cannibal, having eaten his missionary, spits out the shirt buttons to be used as the eyes which see not.” This jesting pause also simultaneously explicitly alludes to violence in colonial contact, and obscures it by turning the indigenous Easter Islander into the cannibalistic consumer of bodies and objects. In this winding passage, then, we learn here not merely that Paul Clitheroe is a well-traveled cosmopolitan, but one with a particular affinity for objects imbued with a sense of the distant past, one that is inseparable from the history of European colonialism, a history that the narrator depicts as relatively benign.³¹ In Clitheroe’s ability to venture out at the margins of “civilization,” he attains a connection to “Pompeiiian antiquities” that he carries with him into the San Francisco present. In other words, his geographical expansiveness—the evidence of which are the objects he brings back with him—signals his intimate relationship with the primitive.

Soon thereafter, in chapter three, the novel initiates an affair between Clitheroe and a transitory southern man named Foxlair (whose name simultaneously ties him to the animalistic “natural” as it suggests he has something to hide); the two stay together in the latter’s hotel room, and he “[plays] the host in the mezzo Monte Cristo fashion...[dines] him, [wines] him, [takes] him for drives among the foot hills, through the wild, warm, spicy canyons, where the birds, and the blossoms, and the bees, refreshed the senses of the sensuous young poet” (*Pleasure* 34). Trite as these images may be, they inarguably signal a connection between homoeroticism, the natural,

and escape from urban space. This all ends abruptly, however, when Clitheroe discovers that Foxlair has stolen his clothes and left San Francisco.

Two moments interest me in this event, neither of which might immediately read as “erotic.” The first is when he first hears intimations about Foxlair’s dubious character. Immediately he returns to his own home: “How sweet the dear old chambers seems to him then; how very, very quiet it was there; how peaceful, how restful!...his pretty bric-a-brac suggesting a thousand souvenirs of the past, of his life in the Islands, where he fancied he was happiest. O, why did he ever care to leave the place? Why was he not satisfied to bury himself among those beloved objects, and hold no further intercourse with the world—save by letter?” (*Pleasure* 36). In the first question, the distinction between his home and the “Islands” collapses; the second retains the distinction but also its separation from “the world,” i.e. his social world. His apartment is a site of freedom from his urban circles, but also from the heartbreak that the novel will treat as inevitable in relation to impossible male-male love and intimacy.

In another moment, when Clitheroe confronts Foxlair about his deceptions—related both to economy and identity—the latter seduces the former with the promise of escape to the South Pacific: “Let’s leave this cursed land. Let us sail into the South Seas. You love them and so do I. There we can be princes, or even kings, and have retinues of lovely slaves, and live a life—oh, such a life as here we can only dream of. Come, will you go to Tahiti, Somoa, Tongatabu?” (*Pleasure* 40). Foxlair’s fantasy of escape seamlessly forms into an imperial fantasy of dominion, of even the enslavement of indigenous peoples in the South Pacific. The eroticized fantasy of dominion successfully seduces Clitheroe; “He would spend the night with Paul,” the narrator seems to sigh (41). This moment demonstrates the limits of the protagonist’s feelings of identification and affiliation with the peoples who occupy the geography for which he aches.

Near the end of Book First, the narrator returns to the theme of Clitheroe's longing for the South Pacific, this time specifically linking geography to Clitheroe's sense of being-at-home:

The poor fellow was drifting helpless and alone—alone as he had ever been more or less alone. In a certain sense this was always the case with him.

For years, like the snail, he had, as it were, carried his house about with him; his home, all that he knew of home, was wherever he chanced to pause for a time, and he had acquired the knack—the art, if you will dignify it by that title—of easy domestication...Most of all, it may be said, he was at his ease under the palms of the Pacific...He knew himself well enough, and many a time when cruising aimlessly in the southern seas, he had gathered by the shore a shell, or in some native grass-thatched village a curio, and had brought these with him as a precious souvenir—certain that the day was sure to come when in the long silence of his summer, or the short sharp gloom of his winter days, only to hear the wail of the savage Islander, piercing the air, would thrill his heart with emotion; only to see the sleek dark forms as they glistened in the spray of the reef, silhouettes on a golden ground, done in Byzantine simplicity, would dazzle and dim his eyes... (*Pleasure* 73-74)

In the figure of the snail, the narrator merges the natural and the domestic; this finds its pinnacle “under the palms of the Pacific.” “Home” seems to unravel here: first “his house,” then “his home,” then “all he knew of home,” and finally “wherever he chanced to pause for a time,” these concepts begin with security and end with heavy qualification. Again the narrator's syntax becomes unwieldy, as though written in a kind of stream of consciousness—delving deeper into the hazy realm of Clitheroe's fantasy and memory. The final central image focuses on “sleek

dark forms”—presumably “native boys”—in shadowed form, embedded into the “golden ground,” bodies coupled to the landscape in an erotic haze.

Book Second arguably finds Clitheroe most “at home,” in the novel’s shortest Book, in the company of Miss Juno, a character he based on Julia (“Dudee”) Fletcher (who wrote under the pseudonym George Fleming) (Austen 147). In the Book’s second chapter, we find them together in a rose garden, introduced in Orientalist terms: “Saadi had no hand in it, yet all Persia could not outdo it” (*Pleasure* 91). Like Clitheroe, this statement suggests, Miss Juno has made a space for the natural in her non-familial domestic sphere. Indeed, the two have much in common:

If Paul and Miss Juno had been formed for one another and were now, at the right moment and under the most favorable auspices, brought together for the first time, they could not have mated more naturally. If Miss Juno had been a young man, instead of a very charming woman, she would of course have been Paul’s chum. If Paul had been a young woman—some of his friends thought he had narrowly escaped it and did not hesitate to say so—he would instinctively have become her confidante. As it was, they promptly entered into a sympathetic friendship which seemed to have been without beginning and was apparently to be without end. (88)

In this description, the narrator suggests here that their shared sense of camaraderie derives from their shared relation to the natural. Suggestively, he introduces the association with the natural and reproductive “mating” but then flatly rejects the connotation. In a series of imaginative gender crossings, the narrator conjures up the various possibilities of their erotic coupling but concludes that theirs is a “sympathetic friendship,” a term that suggests an erotic component to their relationship but refuses codification and taxonomization.³² There is, importantly, a temporal

element to that friendship; it seems to resist a linear timeline. Indeed, it seems to stand outside of time: “without beginning” and “without end.” Like the South Pacific and the native boys who inhabit it, Stoddard associates their shared naturalness with timelessness. Their presence in an Orientalized garden underscores the prelapsarian, Edenic connotations of their natural friendship—a queer Adam and Eve, as it were.

In this space of Orientalized privacy, “there was not breathing-space for conventionality between these two,” the narrator tells us (*Pleasure* 91). Indeed, this is only scene in the novel in which Clitheroe can be said to be content. In fact, he seems an almost entirely different character altogether. Looby has noted this, stating that in each Book Clitheroe performs a different role depending on the social world in which he moves (852). I would disagree only on the basis that it seems that in Books One and Three, Clitheroe seems very much to be the same wayward, melancholic character. It is only in Book Two where we see him at his most “natural.” In fact, the natural takes center stage as the primary topic of their conversation. “Why I like you so much,” Clitheroe tells Miss Juno, “is because you are unlike other girls; that is to say, you’re perfectly natural” (*Pleasure* 97). In response, Miss Juno states, “Most people who think me unlike other girls, think me unnatural for that reason. It is hard to be natural, isn’t it?” (97). To be natural, in this account, is to express gender nonnormativity—to deviate from the “unnaturalness” of social norms. But this discourse does not function as “coding” in any direct way; “to be natural” does not neatly map onto “to be gay.” Miss Juno emphasizes the verb rather than the adjective—a shifting state of being, a state of becoming. Even this somewhat idyllic scene in Miss Juno’s garden, however, is idyllic only in its isolation from the outside world. At the scene’s end, Miss Juno tells Paul, “Let it be a secret that we are chums, dear boy—the world is such an idiot” (99). “All right, Jack,” Paul tells Miss Juno, addressing her in her preferred

masculine name. “Little secrets are cozy” (99). Offering an idyllic space that nonetheless depends upon secrecy, we sense the novel’s own sense of impending impossibility for the natural: “And in the scent of the roses it was duly embalmed,” the narrator concludes, suggesting the preservation of a corpse in decay.

The third section crystallizes this sense of doom. He meets another woman, Little Mama, who immediately tells him “I knew you the moment I saw you; I knew you even before I saw you” (*Pleasure* 122). When Clitheroe raises doubts about such a proclamation, she explains, “...I had heard of you from more sources than one; and then your eyes and your voice, and your gestures, in truth, your whole manner, enables one to classify you at sight” (122). Demonstrating such classification skills, she immediately notices and keenly interprets Clitheroe’s peculiar abode: “Very pretty, very dainty—very feminine; but I don’t object to it in your case...all these fetishes appeal to the uncivilized in your nature. You are only half civilized, you know; that is why I am going to like you; I should hate you if you were like other people” (130). Identifying his difference through his domestic objects—associating them, like Clitheroe himself, with both gender deviance and the “uncivilized”—she invites him to join her “family”: the “Order of Young Knighthood,” a primarily-homosocial quasi-kinship network of young men who live in Little Mama’s large house and for whom Little Mama inhabits the role of matriarch.

While this might seem an ideal—we might even say “utopic”—space for Clitheroe, his attempts at intimacy with two men in the “Order” are unsuccessful, and, more importantly, their “family” is torn apart when Little Mama disappears and Clitheroe makes a series of discoveries. First, he discovers that she has been married to a man named Calvin Falsom and that they have two (biological) children together. He then discovers that Falsom has died, leaving Little Mama to care for those children, move east, and abandon the “Order.” This motherly betrayal catalyzes

Clitheroe's ultimate decision to expatriate. To make sense of this, we cannot understand Clitheroe as merely a queer character of resistance to hetero-patriarchal norms but rather as a character for whom the concept and feeling of being-at-home is both similar to *and* radically different from those norms. If the novel lacks a plot, it is because it works in stops and starts according to Clitheroe's relation to the domestic: he attempts to develop a sense of home, he fails and moves elsewhere, and this process repeats itself until the novel's fantastical ending.

Before Falsom's death, he and Clitheroe share a seemingly mundane discussion about a lunch meeting in which the latter expresses his sense of homelessness in national terms. Falsom presses Clitheroe on why he will not briefly leave his office for lunch: "Do you call yourself a citizen of the Land of the Free, and don't dare to meet a friend for a few moments during business hours?" (*Pleasure* 177). Teased about his questionable "Americanness," Clitheroe responds, "I call myself nothing, least of all a citizen; I have never voted, and I shall never vote!" (177). Here Clitheroe denounces his U.S. citizenship, and that denouncement culminates, in increasingly fantastical form, into the novel's quixotic final image.

In the last chapter of *For the Pleasure of His Company*, Clitheroe decides to skip town—and nation—on a steam ship with a group of fellow Bohemians. One night, late into the evening, he witnesses something strange: "Out of the darkness was evolved the slender hull of a canoe, the wide, many ribbed sail, and the dusky forms of three naked islanders" (*Pleasure* 188). These are not just any "islanders": "Old friends these, pals in the past, young chiefs from an island he had loved and mourned" (188). Without hesitation, Clitheroe joins them in their canoe "with never a glance backward" (188). Abrupt and idealistic, the sudden appearance of "young chiefs" only further highlights the novel's sense of the impossibility of Clitheroe's "success" in finding or creating a home in San Francisco. His "home," the ending suggests, is among these "pals in

the past” with whom he shares affection and affinity across time and geography. This climactic moment is the only one in the novel in which Clitheroe feels unconfined, and it depends on the quasi-magical appearance of three “native” men, whose nakedness seems to promise not only an escape from the artificial trappings of modernity but also sexual freedom and camaraderie.

We might consider *For the Pleasure of His Company* a “closet drama” in the sense that it stages a drama of confinement. Following an almost universal consensus, Thomas Yingling has noted that “there is no psychological depth to [Clitheroe’s] figure,” and he calls this a “vacuum at the center of his character” that indicates “the vacuum homosexuality was for the West at the turn of the century” (92). To be sure, this is not a drama of interior truth remaining hidden out of fear of social or physical violence; there is no “out” to which Clitheroe might “come out”—except in a geographical sense. However, I argue that throughout the novel Clitheroe negotiates *more* than a mere “vacuum” of “meaning.” Clitheroe does have an “inner life”; only it is one to which the narrative allows us little access: “Had the inner life of Paul Clitheroe been made known to the public, no one would have more surprised than his most intimate friends. He was certainly misunderstood; he was a contradiction, as we all are, and in his case especially, the two sides of his nature were as unlike as possible” (*Pleasure* 163). These two sides, the narrator specifies, are not male/female (as in the inversion model of sexuality), nor are they outwardly “straight”/inwardly “gay” (as in the “closet”). Rather, “He delighted to think himself a savage; to declaim against the demoralizing influences of civilization; he yearned to overthrow conventionality with a brave sweep of the hand, and yet he was the final result of a long system of over-education, over-refinement, and over-religious zeal” (163). Rather than read Clitheroe’s lack of interiority as an aesthetic failure on Stoddard’s part, or as a willful concealment of Clitheroe’s/Stoddard’s “inner truth,” we might instead read the novel as a kind of staging of

early-twentieth-century urban U.S. space (“frontier”-like as it may have been) as one in which the process of “naturalization” can no longer—indeed perhaps never could—occur. Having experienced such a process, and feeling alone in that experience, “Sometimes [Clitheroe] felt as if he were stripped naked before the world; as if his secret thoughts were known to the curious public. The idea preyed upon him and made him nervous and ill,” the narrator reveals (59).

“Stripped naked before the world,” Clitheroe becomes the very object of the gaze of which he’d been the subject in the South Pacific; he has become the erotic object against which others define themselves. Exteriority as evidence of interior truth—an idea that the novel repeatedly attempts to resist—is nonetheless an extraordinary source of Clitheroe’s feelings of homelessness. In the novel’s final, utopic expatriation, this problem goes unresolved, Clitheroe’s colonial position is maintained, and the men with whom he magically escapes remain the naked, symbolic objects of erotic (im)possibility.

Throughout the course of his literary career, Stoddard associates erotic possibility with the exotic locales of the “South Seas.” Tracking closely the ways in which he situates homes—and discourses of domesticity more generally—within and without those locales, I hope to have shown how Stoddard offers us a case study in which shifting configurations of sexuality were linked to the colonization of the eroticized South Pacific. If Stoddard has largely been ignored in queer literary studies in recent years, this is likely because his imperialism, his racial fetishism, and his primitivism make him in many ways an “irredeemable” figure. What do we have to gain from close attention to an author whose only full-length biographer dismissed him saying, “It was how he lived, rather than what he wrote, that makes Stoddard of some interest to us today” (Austen xlv)? Kadji Amin has recently argued that queer studies continues either to *polarize* figures as “transgressive versus normative, utopian versus antisocial” or *idealize* them,

“smoothing over or redeeming” their more problematic aspects (4, 5). Such moves, he contends, “cannot adequately account for the textures of racial, historical, and geographical difference—precisely those differences marginalized across the history of queer inquiry” (4). Certainly Stoddard’s life and work refuse such polarization or idealization. Taking Stoddard’s work seriously, without smoothing over the often disturbing, violent resonances of his work, I have attempted to account for such textures. The erotic fantasies of an exotic South Pacific that Stoddard both adopted and propagated, inflected with “a taste for brown bodies,” reveal the racial and colonial underpinnings of what would come to be called “queerness” in the twentieth-century U.S.³³

Chapter Four
Romancing the Primitive:
Willa Cather's Queer Exceptionalism

Queer Studies' Exceptional Cather

Willa Cather never met Charles Warren Stoddard, nor does she appear to have read or even to have heard of him. Still, some strange congruities crop up when the two are placed beside one another. For one, Cather's 1905 short story, "Paul's Case: A Study in Temperament," appears immediately below Stoddard's 1903 *For the Pleasure of His Company* in *The Cambridge Companion to American Gay and Lesbian Literature* (2015).¹ Some of Stoddard's chums, like Rudyard Kipling, Jack London, and Robert Louis Stevenson, were great heroes for Cather, who compared them favorably to the "modernist" writers whom she rejected. Like Stoddard, Cather longed for a sense of "home" even as she traveled frequently, nationally and internationally, for much of her life. Like Stoddard, Cather cast "the primitive" as both a place and a mode of being in which queerness might run wild outside of the trappings of "civilized" modernity. And again like Stoddard, Cather never claimed (publically at least) the identity of "gay" or "lesbian." If Stoddard's career evinces the negotiation of an increasingly consolidated identitarian discourse of sexuality, Cather spent her entire adult life within—and without—this new discursive paradigm.

What are we to make of Cather's supposed "silence," this "absence" in the historical-sexual record? This has perhaps been the most significant question driving queer and feminist studies of Cather's work for over thirty years, since at least Sharon O'Brien's 1984 essay, "'The Thing Not Named': Willa Cather as a Lesbian Writer," and her 1987 biography, *Willa Cather: The Emerging Voice*. In both of those works, O'Brien analyzed Cather's 1922 essay, "The Novel

Démeublé,” an aesthetic manifesto that the critic ingeniously linked to the writer’s sexual obliquity. O’Brien points, in particular, to the following notoriously elusive passage in that essay:

Whatever is felt upon the page without being specifically named there—that, one might say, is created. It is the inexplicable presence of the thing not named, of the overtone divined by the ear but not heard by it, the verbal mood, the emotional aura of the fact of the thing or the deed, that gives high quality to the novel or the drama, as well as to poetry itself. (*On Writing* 50)

In O’Brien’s reading, that “thing not named” derives from Cather’s need “to disguise or conceal the emotional source of her fiction”: lesbian desire that could not articulate itself as such in a male-dominated, homophobic landscape (“Thing Not Named” 577). In her texts, O’Brien claimed, Cather buried her “unspeakable” erotic desires into the silences, evasions, absences, and obliquities that characterize her aesthetic. While this thesis certainly had its detractors, O’Brien’s seemingly simple argument inspired countless feminist and queer critics to approach Cather’s work from the standpoint that not only was Cather a lesbian, but that this identity is crucial to considerations of her art.

Soon after O’Brien published these works came an explosion of scholarship that would come to be called queer theory, and following this came a wave of important queer Cather scholarship. Essays on Cather that appeared in Judith Butler’s *Bodies that Matter* (1993) and Eve Sedgwick’s *Tendencies* (1993) were foundational to this scholarship.² In those essays Butler and Sedgwick were invested in elucidating the significance of gender and sexual cross-identification and –signification in Cather’s work, and ultimately in demonstrating how she stages the inherent instability of those social categories. Sedgwick finds in Cather’s exploration of male-male

“homosocial romance” in *The Professor’s House* (1925) “...the shadows of the brutal suppressions by which a lesbian love did not in Willa Cather’s time and culture freely become visible as itself” (174-5). Contesting this hypothesis, Butler analyzes *My Ántonia* (1918) and “Tommy the Unsentimental” (1896) to counter that “[Sedgwick’s] speculation rests on a missed opportunity to read lesbian sexuality *as* a specific practice of dissimulation produced through the very historical categories that seek to effect its erasure” (145). In other words, whereas Sedgwick sees “brutal suppressions” and the unspeakability of lesbian desire, Butler asks how those suppressions and silences in fact *produce* lesbian subjectivity and desire as well as the “dissimulation” of gender and sexual categories.

Following these essays were two important—and very different—monographs related entirely to Cather and queer theory: Marilee Lindemann’s *Willa Cather: Queering America* (1999) and Jonathan Goldberg’s *Willa Cather and Others* (2001). These works trail Butler and Sedgwick’s footsteps by claiming Cather unequivocally as a lesbian writer invested in “otherness” and in denaturalizing categories of social identity. Through sustained, though often eccentric and idiosyncratic readings across Cather’s oeuvre, biography, and social-historical milieu, both Lindemann and Goldberg set out to show the sheer radicalness of Cather’s queer work; by reading Cather carefully, they seem to propose, we can see not only the unraveling of gender and sexuality, but of race and class as well.

Less interested in claiming Cather as a queer deconstructionist, other important queer scholars have been invested in positioning Cather within the history of sexuality in the U.S. In *Foundlings: Lesbian and Gay Historical Emotion Before Stonewall* (2001), Christopher Nealon traces what he calls “affect-genealogies” in Cather’s work.³ If in the twentieth century, a progressive vision of history was tied to the heterosexually and economically reproductive

nation-state and its idealized micro-unit, the nuclear family, Cather's queer characters express desires for relations across time and space that transcend the logics of blood. On the precarious "outside" of teleological modernity, these characters—and by extension, Nealon suggests, Cather herself—seek alternative modes of being-in-history. In "Catherian Friendship; or, How Not To Do the History of Homosexuality" (2006), however, Scott Herring makes the case that neither Cather nor her queer characters are "outside" history, but rather deeply (however ambivalently) concerned with their embeddedness within it. Even as Cather lived with her life partner Edith Lewis for decades in Greenwich Village, where a quite visible lesbian subculture had already developed, she resisted lesbian identification (which she viewed as one of a piece with "the modern").⁴ Instead, Herring proposes, she favored an earlier model of homosocial attachment: the "Friendship tradition." This tradition was pivotal in the process of sexual formations in the nineteenth-century U.S., and it was a tradition in which Walt Whitman played no small part.⁵ "Friendship" is also Heather Love's focus in *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (2007), though her account of queer friendship in Cather is "marked by impossibility, disconnection, and loss," which in turn "may offer a model for queer history both before and after the invention of modern homosexuality" (75). For Love,

Cather reaches out to readers who are exceptional—those who disidentify with the culture of the present and whose attention is turned toward the difficult and the outmoded. This exclusive invitation is not merely coy, however; Cather means to keep some readers out. Such a refusal raises the stark difficulty of forming a community of the backward: backwardness. The backward slide into the past, away from futurity, away from remembrance, away from us. (73)

In an attempt to de-idealize “friendship” in contemporary queer theory, as well as gay and lesbian modernity’s queer past, Love finds in Cather a representative figure of dissent, one whose refusals index affects and attachments that cannot be consolidated within a progressivist vision of (gay) history. Implicit in all of these queer theoretical accounts surveyed above, I contend, is the desire to read Cather as a kind of “exceptional” queer writer, at times obliquely or defiantly refusing normative sexual categories—hetero- *or* homosexual. If “Cather reaches out to readers who are exceptional,” as Love proposes, those (implicitly queer) readers have in turn reached out to Cather for the kinds of refusals queer theory still holds dear.

If queer theory’s attachment to Cather largely stems from the negative affects she is imagined to emit, recent work by Melissa Homestead has suggested that her letters—rather than her literary work—reveal a Cather who was, if quite private about her erotic life, nonetheless relatively un-conflicted about her lesbian identity.⁶ Un-conflicted as the biographical Cather may have been, I nevertheless argue that in some of her fiction, as well as her early journalism, she articulated visions of queer (un)becoming that are not only non-heteronormative but are resolutely anti-identitarian and even anti-social *tout court*. Central to those visions, I contend, is the act of “becoming-Native”: not identification or resemblance to indigenous peoples, but feelings of affective becoming.⁷ If “going native” has a long history in the discourse of U.S. colonialism, *becoming-Native* in Cather’s fiction occurs at the level of physical sensation, available only to the exceptional few who refuse modernity’s present.⁸ “Becoming-Native” accords with some of contemporary queer theory’s most recent preoccupations, particularly the “anti-social thesis.”⁹ Juxtaposing anti-social theory with scenes of queer (un)becoming in Cather’s oeuvre, this final chapter seeks not only novel ways to understand the relation between queerness, primitivism, and the history of sexuality in that work, but to unpack some of the

underlying exceptionalist assumptions that continue to shape queer studies. Drawing on the queer historical work of Nealon, Herring, Homestead, Love, and others, this chapter “feels backward” in order to ask what Cather’s presence in the queer American literary canon might tell us about the aims and limitations of queer studies today—now that queer studies, too, has a history.

If the Cather criticism I survey above is invested in unpacking the significance of history and temporality in the treatment of sexuality in Cather’s life and work, in this chapter I wish to situate that history in a particular place, another U.S. borderland. I argue that Cather’s rendering of “native-ness”—an essential component of queer (un)becoming in her works—figures itself on geographies and Native bodies within the American Southwest. Cather’s Southwest is unequivocally a “frontier,” but a frontier of the past, “preserved in bright, dry sunshine, like a fly in amber,” as she once described the Indian ruins of Mesa Verde (“Mesa Verde” 214). Though Cather’s career began after Frederick Jackson Turner announced the frontier’s “closing” in “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” her novels continually return to this idealized site as an implicit indictment—rather than evidence or explanation—of American modernity. As such, the Southwest functions in Cather’s texts as a retreat from or refusal of the social, a utopic otherwise, and an untamed wild in which new erotic and social possibilities might be imagined and even forged. By idealizing these imagined possibilities, Cather as well as contemporary queer theory reifies U.S. settler colonial discourses that situate the “Native” as modernity’s spatial and temporal constitutive “outside.”

Grappling With the Natural in Cather’s 1890s Journalism

Willa Cather shared yet another preoccupation with Stoddard around the turn of the twentieth century that links them in the queer literary genealogy I have treated throughout this dissertation: a desire for “the natural.” To begin with, then, I want to turn our attention to Cather’s language of “the natural” in her frequently-commented-upon responses to a critical moment in the history of sexuality in the U.S. and abroad: the Wilde trials. “It is of course by now common to think of the Wilde trials as a moment of crystallization,” Peter Coviello writes, “when the disparate, scattered, and inchoate energies of previous decades of legal wrangling, psychological profiling, medical opinion, demographic scrutiny, pedagogical insistence, and economic consolidation achieved—seemingly in one swift movement—their coordinated and astoundingly well-publicized fulfillment” (*Tomorrow’s Parties* 8). As a young journalist in the 1890s, Cather was not just aware of these trials; she also vocally denounced Wilde and his work in three separate pieces, which took up the question of “the natural” head on and in unequivocal relation to questions of erotics and aesthetics. We can hear in them, as we can in much of this early criticism, an arguably conservative (perhaps even homophobic) register that some critics have had difficulty reconciling with Cather’s purportedly radical social vision in her novels. These works included an 1894 review of Wilde’s play *Lady Windermere’s Fan* in the *Nebraska State Journal* and two more pieces in 1895, one in the *Journal* and the other in the *Lincoln Courier*: “The Aesthetic Movement” and “Hélas!,” both published in the wake of Wilde’s trials and subsequent prison sentence. In her 1894 review, Cather criticizes what she sees as Wilde’s failure to write about his play’s theme of motherhood, and anoints motherhood with religious significance: “The theme of Mr. Wilde’s play is motherhood, a thing which no man can ever realize, which a man of Mr. Wilde’s ethics and school and life cannot even conceive. To hear Mr. Wilde on that subject is like hearing one of the very little satans philosophizing on Calvary”

(*Kingdom* 388-9). Cather removes Wilde so completely from the realm of parentage that he becomes a diminutive, blaspheming “little satan” who dares to broach the topic with a “philosophy...so contemptible, so inane, so puny...” (389). She continues this course of thought in her piece, “The Aesthetic Movement,” where she pronounces, “A man who founds his art upon a lie lives a lie, it matters not what form his sins may take. He has in him the potentiality of all sin, the begetter of all evil—insincerity” (390). This remark does the peculiar work of justifying Wilde’s imprisonment, first conflating “sin” (read: sodomy) and “insincerity,” then distinguishing the two.

In so doing, Cather “[reactivates] the ancient, barely latent definitional antithesis between homosexual acts and *the natural*,” as Eve Sedgwick explains (169, emphasis in original). In that reactivation, she reinforces the conflation of homosexuality and the unnatural but also “holds open a small shy gap of nonidentification” (169). What Sedgwick desires in that “small shy gap” is a Cather who leaves open the question of the “naturalness” of homosexuality. But what if “the natural” was in fact *central* to Cather’s vision of queerness, and of queer exceptionalism? What if we were to take Cather at her word when she states that her problem with Wilde was, indeed, a matter of literary philosophy and aesthetic differences? That he had strayed from an idea of “the natural” that did *not* easily map onto what would come to be called “heterosexuality?” Roughly three years beforehand in June 1892, at the age of eighteen, Cather had already invoked “the natural” in her discussion of same-sex love, in a now famous letter that she sent to Louise Pound.¹⁰ She wrote:

I wanted very much to ask you to go through the customary goodbye formality, but I thought it might disgust you a little so I did’nt. It was so queer that I should want to, when three years ago I had never seen you, and I suppose in three years

more—but I dont like to think of that, three years have’nt any right to make any difference and of course they will, and I suppose we will laugh at it all some day as other women do, it make[s] me feel horribly to think of that, it will be worse than if we should hate each other. It is manifestly unfair that “feminine friendships” should be unnatural, I agree with Miss De Pue that far. (*Letters* 17)

Focusing on the language of “disgust” as evidence of Cather’s internalized homophobia, critics often read this early letter as an anguished example of her pained acknowledgement of the necessity of secrecy regarding her feelings toward women in the late nineteenth century. Without rejecting this reading wholesale, we might also read this letter as Cather’s reckoning with two competing discourses, however amorphous, coming to a head: the discourse of friendship and a biological discourse of the natural. It is clear in Cather’s letter which one she prefers, and Cather retained her preference for this nineteenth-century discourse her entire life, maintaining a “Boston marriage” (another carry-over from the nineteenth century) for nearly forty years with Edith Lewis from 1908 to the time of her death in 1947. If Cather was an “anti-modern” then (and most signs point to the affirmative), one aspect of her anti-modernism is her upending of twentieth-century sexual discourses, including the dichotomy of the natural and the unnatural that privileged heterosexuality as the former and homosexuality (or “feminine friendships”) as the latter.¹¹ In her journalism and her fiction, “the natural” is not heterosexuality or heteronormative intimacies and attachments but rather a particular (importantly non-identitarian) affective attachment to an atavistic past. That attachment serves a social and historical purpose: to keep in check the forward march of modernity and the so-called perversions it induces, perversions that, for Cather, Wilde served as representative.

If Wilde is “unnatural,” as Cather would have it, I suggest that this perhaps has more to do with his relation to modernity than to sexuality. Wilde’s fate, and in turn the fate of Aesthetic Movement for which Cather claims him as representative, “is a legitimate consequence of the hurried, hectic life of the end of the century,” she writes. “Every century or so society decides to improve on nature. It becomes very superior and refined indeed, until right through its surface there breaks some ghastly eruption that makes it hide its face in shame” (*Kingdom* 390). For many queer critics following Sedgwick, Cather’s language of a “ghastly eruption” and its subsequent “shame” demonstrates her early effemiphobia, her internalized homophobia, her own “shame.” Sedgwick looks to Cather’s short story “Paul’s Case” as a later instance of possible identification between the masculine lesbian writer and the effeminate gay male protagonist, but we might see in Cather’s early essay on Wilde a young writer already articulating such identifications and dis-identifications. “I am not speaking of his crimes against society, which all men know,” Cather writes. “I am speaking of his crimes against literature, which came much earlier, which only a few saw and lamented” (391). Those crimes are against “the holy spirit in man”; “The sins of the body are very small compared with that” (391). It is difficult to discern whether this is an indictment or a justification for Wilde’s “sins of the body.” When read by themselves, these two essays indeed read as though she conflates Wilde’s “crimes against literature” with “the sins of the body.” But when we read them alongside several other early essays she published around this time, we increasingly sense that her indictment is aimed not at Wilde’s sodomitical “sins” but at the cultural-historical shifts that had given those “sins” such discursive power. That “ghastly eruption” to which Cather alludes, I want to suggest, is not the sudden historical emergence of “perverse” sexuality but the return of the primitive that so-called “perversity” calls forth.

If Wilde's artificiality and "insincerity" proved distasteful to the young critic Cather, the works she did hold in high esteem emphasized "the natural" and "the primitive" as supreme artistic modes. In another essay published in the *Lincoln Courier* in 1895 called "On Nature and Romance," she proposed an early aesthetic theory in a resolutely anti-modern vein. Here, as in her Wilde essays, she also expresses her distaste and dismay with the present, calling it a "complex world" and lamenting the onset of modernity's effect on art: "Just now, when the 'end of the century' feeling has its undoubted influence, both literature and drama look discouraging" (*Kingdom* 231). Disparaging the psychological realism in vogue at the "end of the century," she declares in no uncertain terms, "Romance is the highest form of fiction, and it will never desert us (232-3). But what did Cather mean by "Romance?"

For Cather, "romance" was not tethered to specific generic conventions or literary periods but a difficult-to-define transcendent quality in art that raises it above the banalities of modern life in the U.S. Importantly, Cather attaches the fate of romance to the fate of U.S. empire, both adopting and countering a Turnerian teleology of modern progress made possible by settler contact with the "American frontier." Citing the fall of Rome, Cather predicts the fall of U.S. empire through over-modernization:

But the final tendencies and destiny are in the keeping of a greater hand than ours, of that great intelligence who—when the Roman world had corrupted the civilization it had made, enslaved the state it had freed, grown monstrous in its pleasures—has the barbarian races ready to destroy and renew, brought down the shows of the Danube to cool the heated blood of the south, and the great hammer of Thor to crush the defiled altars of Aphrodite in the dust. Humanity cannot utterly blast itself, even when it tries. Some day, perhaps when our civilization has

grown too utterly complex, when our introspection cuts off all action, when our forms have killed all ambition, when sincerity and simplicity have utterly gone from us and we are only a bundle of nerves, then the savage strength of the Slav or the Bushmen will come upon us and will burn our psychologies and carry us away into captivity and make us dress the vines and plow the earth and teach us that after all nature is best... (*Kingdom* 232).

For Cather the primitive returns in these periods of over-modernization as an answer and an antidote to the corruption of societies so civilized as to become, paradoxically, “monstrous in [their] pleasures.” She then points to writers who might instigate this return of the primitive: Rudyard Kipling, Anthony Hope (the author of *The Prisoner of Zenda* [1894]), and “their great master and chief who died down in the blue Pacific last winter when the winds of December were covering us with snow,” Robert Louis Stevenson (232). She admired in these writers what she saw as a resistance to literary models, both new and old; she admired, that is, their exceptional qualities, their individuality, accessed through their relation to “the primitive.” Of Stevenson, she wrote that “he was never betrayed into writing novels on heredity, or divorce, or the vexed problems of society, seeing that his business was to make, not to analyze; literature, not social science. Living down there [in Samoa] in the wealth and fragrance of unceasing summer, in the sunlight and starlight of tropic seas and meridian lands, with the heathen and nature, who is the greatest heathen of all, he wrote books of fancy, pure and simple” (311). Of Rudyard Kipling, who in 1894 was “trying to live a respectable Puritan life in Vermont and be a full-fledged family man,” Cather urged, “It would be more encouraging to hear that he had taken opium or strong drink or that he had married a half-caste woman and was raising vermilion hades out in India. Go back to the east, Mr. Kipling; we and our world are not for you” (317). If

“Romance,” according to Cather, was “the highest form of fiction,” those heights seem to be achievable only through a connection to “the natural,” “the primitive,” accessible only to those who venture to the outskirts of “civilization.” Implicit here is a geographical—indeed, imperial—component to what Cather conceived of literary greatness: one must go beyond the border of one’s homeland.

Cather writes about that homeland, in “On Nature and Romance” as well as other essays, in the language of the familial. In a review of Marie Wainwright’s production of *The Daughters of Eve* entitled “A Primitive Force,” Cather writes the following, noting first Wainwright’s exceptionalism: “Down there [Virginia] a woman of Wainwright blood could not live just like other women, she must have a special code of her own” (230). Apparently espousing the belief that some families are more exceptional than others, deploying the language of “blood,” she nonetheless posits that Marie Wainwright—and other men and women like her—transcend the trappings and proprieties of familial custom to become, exceptionally, something else entirely, beyond the logics of “heredity”:

A house may set up for itself household gods greater than those of other men, it may distort life by super-refinement as much as other men brutalize it by vulgarity, it may be rigid in its life and merciless in its judgment and go on so for years, being more correct than nature and more proper than God. But at last there comes into the world some scion who reverses all this dreary artificiality and goes desperately back to the native. (230)

This “household” is described in remarkably similar terms to the “Rome” (i.e. the United States) about which she writes in “On Nature and Romance.” Wainwright, Cather suggests, becomes such a scion because of her rejection of the family—and, by extension, perhaps her rejection of

the nation. She does so by “becoming-native,” becoming “primitive.” Such primitivism is suggested by the very title of the play on which Cather was reporting: the Edenic discourse in which “Eve” plays a crucial role. As I have noted, this discourse was crucial to each of the authors examined in this dissertation: Charles Warren Stoddard, Emily Dickinson, and, of course, Walt Whitman, with which whose “primitive force” Cather had also to contend.

Cather’s affinity for “Romantics” like Kipling and Stevenson was shared by Charles Warren Stoddard, a fellow compatriot-in-primitivism who knew them personally. But it is Cather’s and Stoddard’s shared identification with Whitman that is perhaps most illuminating with regard to their attachment to the primitive erotic as a social and political force. Cather did not share Stoddard’s enthusiasm for Whitman when she wrote about him in 1896 in the *Nebraska State Journal*, four years after the poet’s death. The essay begins, acerbically, “[There] is more talk of a monument to Walt Whitman, ‘the good, gray poet.’ Just why the adjective good is always applied to Whitman it is difficult to discover, probably because people who could not understand him at all took for granted that he meant well” (*Kingdom* 351). Cather distinguishes herself, in this opening lines, from “people who could not understand him”; as someone who *can*, she suggests, she can both charge him for his literary faults and recognize what value his poetry does happen to offer. Tallying these faults, Cather criticizes Whitman for his “catholic taste” and calls him “the poet of the dung hill as well as of the mountains.” This, she declares, is “admirable in theory but excruciating in verse” (351).

However, Cather’s essay does note some value in the recently deceased poet. In particular, she praises his primitiveness:

But however ridiculous Whitman may be there is a primitive elemental force about him. He is so full of hardiness and of the joy of life. He looks at all nature

in the delighted, admiring way in which the old Greeks and the primitive poets did. He exults so in the red blood of his body and the strength in his arms. He has such a passion for the warmth and dignity of all that is natural. He has no code but to be natural, a code that this complex world has so long outgrown. He is sensual, not after the manner of Swinburne and Gautier, who are always seeking for perverted and bizarre effects on the senses, but in the frank fashion of the old barbarians who ate and slept and married and smacked their lips over the mead horn. He is rigidly limited to the physical, things that quicken his pulses, please his eyes or delight his nostrils. There is an element of poetry in all this, but it is by no means the highest. If a joyous elephant should break forth into song, his law would probably be very much like Whitman's famous "song of myself." It would have just about as much delicacy and deftness and discriminations...He had no more thought of good or evil than the folks in Kipling's *Jungle Book*. (*Kingdom* 352-3)

Admiring what she calls his "primitive elemental force," she connects the masculine sensuality of his poetry ("the red blood of his body and the strength of his arms") to a bygone era. This sensuality, distinct from that of Algernon Charles Swinburne and Théophile Gautier, whom she associates with the "perversion" of modernity ("always seeking for perverted and bizarre effects on the senses") is "frank," simple, pure, without moral codes or dilemmas: "[Whitman] has no code but to be natural, a code that this complex world has so long outgrown." For readers of Stoddard, "to be natural" signals a particular kind of becoming, one that Cather casts as a thing of the past. While Stoddard uses this term later than 1896 (as we saw, it was sprinkled throughout his 1903 *For the Pleasure of His Company*), I am interested in Cather's backward-

looking glance. What she finds in Whitman in contradistinction to the perversions of a “complex world” she also finds in the “old Greeks and the primitive poets” of the distant past. To be “natural,” to be “primitive,” is to experience or achieve a state of sensation that refuses naming: desire without codification, “pure” physicality without morality or psychology. Reaching not far back in time for this primitive Whitman, Cather conflates the wild jungles of Kipling’s novel with the recent literary past of the United States: possibilities for wildness no longer accessible, she imagines, in modernity.

Even as Cather later embraced Whitman, alluding to him in the title of her “second first novel” *O Pioneers!*, this early demonstration of ambivalence does much to illuminate Cather’s self-positioning as an artist in the fraught decade of the 1890s.¹² If her *O Pioneers!* reference suggests her possible identification with an imperialist Whitman, this early essay and her later novels suggest a deeper sense of affiliation under the sign of “the primitive,” which both was and was not of a piece with Whitman’s imperialist strain. As in Dickinson and in Stoddard, “the primitive” in Cather signals a racialized disidentification with U.S. nationalism but nonetheless reifies its logics of spatial and temporal containment and displacement. If the young Cather praised the “primitive” in Whitman and disparaged the “over-civilized” Wilde, it turns out that Wilde harbored his own—notably queer—primitivist fantasies, which he relayed in an interview that appeared in Cather’s early literary home, the *Nebraska State Journal*. When on his 1882 U.S. tour he was asked by a reporter when he would return to England, Wilde replied:

I can’t say. I want to travel over your country, (I suppose it is yours), thoroughly before I go back home. I would mount the fiery coyote and chase to his lair the fierce and bloodthirsty broncho. I would seat myself in a poncho, with a swarthy and picturesque Mexican at my side, and float down the silvery Rio Grande where

the myriad lariats which fringe the stream send forth their sweet fragrance. I want to see the untamed savage surrounded by his kind, unfettered by the follies of a garish world, and ungirded by the bonds of frivolous fashion. Clad in the skins of the chase, and adorned with primary colors from nature's laboratory, the claybank, I want to listen to him chant the tepee or walk through the sinuous mazes of his wild wampum. (*Kingdom* 387-8 [footnote])

This passage, however facetious, suggests that perhaps Wilde and Cather possessed more similarities than she would have cared to admit. Wilde's fantasy of primitive communion "with a swarthy and picturesque Mexican," his racialized, homoerotic cowboy fantasy playfully upending a masculinist American frontier mythos, his desire to escape "the follies of a garish world" and "the bonds of frivolous fashion": these could all conceivably describe the central moments in Cather's later fiction in which her exceptional queer protagonists "become Native." Populated by Mexicans, Indians, and the racially ambiguous "untamed savage surrounded by his kind," Wilde likely locates this erotic fantasy of settler adventure and exploration in the American Southwest, quintessentially "American" space, land imagined as yet-unsettled despite the land claims of the U.S. nation-state, which Wilde alludes to, in suggestive parentheses: "(I suppose it is yours)."

Becoming-Ancient: Sensation in *The Song of the Lark* (1915)

In Cather's essays, as well as her later fiction, "the natural" emerges out of modernity as an answer and an antidote to too much "improvement." Often alluded to but rarely taken seriously, Cather's early journalism demonstrates an early commitment to "the primitive" and "the romantic" that she continued to develop throughout her entire career. As biographer James Woodress writes, "She was a Romantic and a primitive from the start, but it was not until she

was in her forties that she was able to utilize effectively her own experiences to weave the myths of the American past into the magical fabric of her best fiction” (xiii). It is telling, I think, that Woodress characterizes Cather as *a* Romantic, as *a* primitive, rather than as a writer for whom these categories offered insight and inspiration. Like so many Cather critics (even, and perhaps especially, queer critics) Woodress attaches Cather’s novels’ trends and preoccupations to Cather herself. Central to Cather’s very identity, Woodress seems to suggest, are “the Romantic” and “the primitive,” the foundations on which she would, later in her life, interweave with “experiences” and “myths” to finally produce “the magical fabric of her best fiction.” In what follows, I examine queer moments of narrative rupture in that “magical fabric” in an attempt to understand the patterns, the shapes that “the primitive” take in two of Cather’s major works, produced after the consolidation of identitarian discourses of sexuality and frequently read by queer theorists in a quasi-biographical vein. Thea Kronberg, Cather’s autobiographical protagonist of *The Song of the Lark*, experiences remarkably similar fantasies of the American Southwest in the arguably central episode of this Künstlerroman. Late in the novel, which charts Kronberg’s early career as an opera singer in Chicago, she grows weary of city life and the opera scene: “All her life,” the narrator explains, “she had been hurrying and sputtering, as if she had been born behind time and had been trying to catch up” (*Song* 329). Her inability “to catch up” positions her “behind time,” stubbornly attached to the past even in her attempts to conform to temporal norms, evincing what many queer theorists have come to call “queer temporality.” Thea’s “behind-ness” signals what Elizabeth Freeman has called “temporal drag,” in which the supposed forward march of history is impeded by feelings of “retrogression, delay, and the pull of the past on the present” (*Time Binds* 62).¹³ A similar phenomenon occurs in Cather’s texts, a phenomenon I am calling “becoming-Native.” In *The Song of the Lark*, Thea drags, she lags *until*

she communes with nature and the imagined ghosts of ancient Navajo Indians in the novel's singular scene of absolute stasis.

It is only outside of the metropole that Thea can experience herself as outside of time: "She had got to a place where she was out of the stream of meaningless activity and undirected effort," writes the narrator (*Song* 329). To do this, it seems, she must be alone. As such, she resembles the intrepid individualistic pioneer-explorer mythologized by Manifest Destiny ideology, exalted by poets like Whitman, and romanticized by U.S. historians like Frederick Jackson Turner.¹⁴ In "The Ancient People" (as this section in the novel is titled), solitude is inscribed in the very landscape, as if foreshadowing Thea's destiny for singular greatness: "Each tree grows alone, murmurs alone, thinks alone. They do not intrude upon each other. The Navajos are not much in the habit of giving or asking help. Their language is not a communicative one, and they never attempt an interchange of personality in speech" (325). At first personifying the trees of Panther Cañon (based on Walnut Canyon in Arizona, which Cather visited in 1912), the narrator then moves to a description of "Navajos" so seamlessly that both seem the same natural features of the same landscape, exemplars of non-relational individuality on the Southwestern terrain. Navajos and trees, as the narrator would have them, are imbued with a sense of solitary transcendence; embedded within them is a state "beyond language," beyond communication, beyond the social. The repetition of negative phrases ("do not," "are not," "is not," "they never") signal the significance of refusal in sustaining one's solitude.

This refusing landscape awakens in Thea a similar will to refusal. Repeatedly the narrator moves in and out of her thoughts to catalogue what Thea must refuse, despite it being slightly ambiguous why she must do so. During her entrance into the Canyon, the narrator writes, "The personality of which she was so tired seemed to let go of her" (*Song* 326). Further, "The old,

fretted lines which marked one off, which defined her—made her Thea Kronberg, Bowers’s accompanist, a soprano with a faulty middle voice—were all erased” (326). Here she imagines herself to be stripped of identity, freed of “the old, fretted lines,” impervious to being “marked...off.” In other words, she is free—through her very non-relation to others. In her anti-identitarianism, Thea becomes, in queer theoretical terms, a resolutely queer character. If, as Lee Edelman famously posits, “[Queerness] can never define an identity; it can only ever disturb one,” in this episode in the novel Thea becomes defined by indefinability (*No Future* 17).

Not long after spending time in solitude in Panther Cañon, Thea begins to experience a sensation that, like the Navajos and trees before her, transcends language: “She was singing very little now, but a song would go through her head all morning, as a spring keeps welling up, and it was like a pleasant sensation indefinitely prolonged. It was much more like a sensation than like an idea, or an act of remembering” (*Song* 330). Indeed Thea begins to imagine herself as un-becoming-human:

Music had never before come to her in that sensuous form. It had always been a thing to be struggled with, had always brought anxiety and exaltation and chagrin—never content and indolence. Thea began to wonder whether people could not utterly lose the power to work, as they can lose their voice or their memory. She had always been a little drudge, hurrying from one task to another—as if it mattered! And now her power to think seemed converted into a power of sustained sensation. She could become a mere receptacle for heat, or become a colour, like the bright lizards that darted about on the hot stones outside her door; or she could become a continuous repetition of sound, like the cicadas. (330)

Thea *feels differently*, at the level of the body, at the level of sensation. She calls up its former association with work, with struggle, with labor, with intellectual capacity, then dismisses them for a more “pure” kind of association: “sustained sensation,” unproductive pleasure for no other sake but pleasure. Unbecoming human, she becomes a “receptacle” for sensations, for colors, for sounds; an object having shed her subjectivity. She is content in “continuous repetition.”

This repetition, the narrator later tells us, is “transmitted to her” from “those old people...out of the rock-shelf on which she lay”; the narrator describes it variously as “a certain understanding,” “certain feelings,” certain only in their uncertainty (*Song* 333). They are “simple, insistent, and monotonous, like the beating of Indian drums” (333). And again the narrator emphasizes that this occurs at the level of bodily sensation: these rhythms, this “understanding,” these “feelings,” “translate themselves into attitudes of body, into degrees of muscular tension or relaxation; the naked strength of youth, sharp as the sun-shafts...” (333). Imagining herself to become one with her natural surroundings, Thea begins to harbor similar fantasies about their former inhabitants, so much so that she shares a child with a Navajo woman:

On the first day that Thea climbed the water-trail, she began to have intuitions about the women who had worn the path, and who had spent so great a part of their lives going up and down it. She found herself trying to walk as they must have walked, with a feeling in her feet and knees and loins which she had never known before—which must have come up to her out of the accustomed dust of that rocky trail. She could feel the weight of an Indian baby hanging to her back as she climbed. (332)

Again, repetition is emphasized: “going up and down” the worn path Thea remains in the limbo of Panther Cañon’s static time. She imagines herself sharing feelings, again at the level of physical sensation, with these women, “with a feeling in her feet and knees and loins which she had never known before.” Feeling “the weight of an Indian baby hanging to her back,” Thea experiences a convergence of strange temporalities: reproductive time that nonetheless weighs down on the present, ever pulling her back into the past. This imagined communion—this “imagined community,” in Benedict Anderson’s terms, which similarly rests on a sense of shared temporality—depends on the notion that Indians are the past to the Thea’s cross-temporal present. In this way, they are what René Bergland calls the “national uncanny” to Thea’s exceptional subject. Bergland argues that in much U.S. literature, Indians are “ghostly figures of the irrational” who must be expelled from national consciousness, but here Thea achieves transcendence through her absorption of that “irrationality” (*Uncanny* 53). If, as Bergland claims, “Indian spectralization is the literary corollary to Indian Removal, removing Indians from American culture as they are removed from American territory,” Thea would seem to move beyond those violent logics in a purportedly non-identitarian, cross-racial, cross-temporal communion (65).

However, contextualizing Thea’s experience in Panther Cañon, we find that that absorption, that alliance of sorts, only reifies the logics of removal it would seem to upend. Many critics—even those explicitly concerned with Cather’s grappling with U.S. empire—neglect to mention that Thea’s adventure depends on the familial property of the man she will marry at the novel’s end. It is often treated as inconsequential in queer readings of the novel that this idyllic scene of Thea’s (un)becoming, this supposed escape from “civilization” and modernity, is made possible by her tie to Fred Ottenburg, and Fred’s hereditary ties to familial

wealth. “I don’t think I told you,” he tells Thea shortly before she makes this sojourn, “but my father owns a whole cañon full of Cliff-Dweller ruins. He has a big worthless ranch down in Arizona, near a Navajo reservation, and there’s a cañon on the place they call Panther Cañon, chock full of that sort of thing” (*Song* 319). Owning the cañon, he presumes familial ownership of the Cliff-Dweller ruins themselves, and his propertied relation allows Thea access to them she would not have otherwise. If Thea’s transcendence in Panther Cañon might be said to be queer, then, her ability to achieve such transcendence depends on the heteronormative capitalistic relationships that she would seem to resist. Fred’s “I don’t think I told you” hints at, even as the narrator ultimately obscures, the silences of history that made that ownership possible. Thus, Thea can imagine Navajo Indians as relics of the past, as kindred ghosts to call forth—despite Panther Cañon being near a never-again-mentioned Navajo reservation, the present-day evidence of settler occupation and histories of indigenous displacement.

Many also neglect to note that time seems to stop *only* when Thea is alone. When Fred Ottenburg arrives, the novel’s heterosexual plot tying Thea and Fred in marriage presses forward full-speed. And as time moves forward, Thea’s “fretted lines” of identity begin to return. While Christopher Nealon suggests that Fred and Thea’s relationship is not just any “normal” heterosexual relationship, noting examples of tension and gender nonconformity in both that suggest possibilities of queer companionship, those possibilities are nonetheless foreclosed *not* by the marriage at the novel’s end (which readers also often fail even to notice) but by the settler socio-economic propertied familialism of which marriage is of a piece and of which it is imagined as a culmination. As landowner then, Fred’s return also reminds us that Thea’s sovereign fantasy places her not outside of time but in the very overlapping temporalities of settler-indigenous time, which inherently call into question the purported givenness of settler

occupancy.¹⁵ Those contradictions manifest in the ways in which Thea relates to the caves of Panther Cañon. If we saw Stoddard, in both his fiction and his life, attempt to make natural his domestic space, Thea tries to domesticate her cave. She imagines, “It brought her centuries nearer to these people to find that they saw their houses exactly as she saw them” (*Song* 336-7). Natural preservation becomes a kind of ghostly reservation. Calling these caves “houses,” the novel’s anachronistic misnomer seems to confuse—rather than fuse—past and present. But that confusion points us to a fundamental tension in “The Ancient People,” one that the narrator, ventriloquizing Thea, in fact makes explicit: “She was a guest in these houses, and ought to behave as such” (336).

In these scenes of cross-temporal communion, even as they “lengthen her past” and open her to “higher obligations,” we see how Thea’s exceptional ability to shed her identity is achieved through her exceptional relation to Indianness, her ability to receive the messages and affects transmitted by “Indians” through nature so that she might experience her queer solitary sublimity. (That tension echoes the one produced by Oscar Wilde’s parenthetical in his primitivist cowboy fantasy: “[I suppose it is yours]”). “Becoming-Native” means for Thea Kronberg the shedding, the refusal of her identity; in the end, through this “(un)becoming,” she achieves her goal of becoming a great opera singer. She has entered, however ambivalently, back into the civilized metropole, back into modernity, back into what Lee Edelman calls the “reproductive futurism” inherently attached to “the social” (despite her indifference to both her marriage to Fred and to bearing children). In the next section, I turn our attention to Cather’s 1925 novel *The Professor’s House*, and to its protagonists Godfrey St. Peter and Tom Outland: arguably, in Cather criticism at least, the writer’s exceptional queers *par excellence*, whose

relations to “primitive” women illuminate the political problematics of queerness as theorized in an anti-relational vein.

Becoming-Primitive: the Death Drive in *The Professor’s House* (1925)

“Future” is the last word in Cather’s famous 1925 novel—strange, perhaps, for a novel so seemingly preoccupied with, so romantically attached to the past. Indeed the present and the future seem to promise nothing for its protagonist, the titular professor, Godfrey St. Peter. And of course, for Tom Outland, whose death in the Great War shadows the entire novel, there is “no future.” And so, like its protagonists, the novel retreats to many pasts, each overlapping and intertwined: the colonial past St. Peter romantically recounts in the books he writes about the history of Spanish conquest of the Americas, the frontier past that Tom Outland recounts in his diary of the time he spends in the American Southwest, and the more ancient past that Tom (and transitively St. Peter) imagine themselves to access through the Indian ruins of the Blue Mesa—which, like Panther Cañon in *The Song of the Lark*, Cather populates with the ghosts of the “Cliff-dwellers.”

The Professor’s House is perhaps the best example of Cather’s works’ “anti-modernism,” their stubborn refusal of the conditions of the present, their “disdain for the new, the cheap, the fast, the mass-produced, and the ‘smart,’” as Heather Love puts it (*Feeling Backward* 72). This quality of Cather’s writing, frequently disparaged by her less generous critics as reactionary, conservative, and nostalgic, has been taken up by queer theorists who see the radical potential of her backward turn. That radicalness is almost always related to her protagonists’ dissent against social norms, their insistent “no.” As I noted in this chapter’s introduction, critics have variously highlighted the ways in which Cather’s texts express that dissent, many of them focusing

primarily on *The Professor's House* in those discussions: by producing “affect-genealogies” that challenge hetero-reproductive accounts of intimacy, belonging, and national history (Nealon); and by privileging nineteenth-century forms of homo-eroticism and -sociality that challenge both the linear progress narratives of modernity as well as the modern homo-/hetero- binary (Herring, Love, Homestead).

But as revelatory as these discussions have been, I want to suggest that there are limits to this critical focus on Catherian refusal: first, that it produces a Cather whose exceptionalism is tied to a notion of “queer exceptionalism” that is in need of serious reevaluation, and relatedly, that it fails to address how Cather often figures the negative, the anti-social, the anti-identitarian, and the death drive through the trope of primitivism more generally, and through the figure of the Indian more specifically. With the exception of Christopher Nealon, critics frequently neglect to acknowledge the colonial underpinnings of St. Peter's, Tom Outland's, and finally perhaps Cather's own queer anti-modernism.¹⁶ Against the global catastrophe of the Great War, understood by Cather as the violent culmination of modernity's “over-civilization,” her heroes retreat to “innocent,” even romantic colonial narratives in which the genocidal effects of European colonialism are refigured into narratives of exceptional attachment to “the primitive.” In *The Professor's House*, colonial violence is obscured by and even transformed into queer romance.

Cather's anti-modernism—her and her characters' resistance to the forward march of history—finds its analogue in contemporary queer theory in its “anti-social” iterations espoused most prominently by Leo Bersani and Lee Edelman. In both theorists' works, the radical potential (what we might call the exceptionalism) of queerness rests on its embrace of the death drive: the unconscious desire for objects that impede or deny familialism, futurity, and even life

itself. And while their theorizations have been widely criticized, I believe it is still productive to engage an Edelmanian reading of *The Professor's House* because a negative frame of exceptionalism continues to underlie queer Cather criticism. Despite Cather's explicit anti-Freudianism, *The Professor's House* stages in its final act, in a recognizably Edelmanian mode, St. Peter's refusal of the future as a psychic death drive that continues to preoccupy Cather critics.¹⁷ Crucial to this refusal, I contend, is that it is rendered as a drive toward "the primitive." Thus, in its queer challenges to heteronormativity, identity, and history, *The Professor's House* relies on the image of the Indian as a figure of death. Queer psychoanalytic accounts of this novel, even as they traffic in the discourse of the primitive, aim to demonstrate its anti-identitarian exceptionalism, but fail to interrogate the racialized discourse that undergirds it.¹⁸

The Professor's House tells a seemingly simple story, dramatizing a family patriarch's gradual, then not so gradual, self-distancing from his wife and daughters when they purchase a new home and he insists on staying put. That distancing, we learn, had begun much earlier with the appearance of Tom Outland, a young cowboy with whom Godfrey St. Peter has an intimate friendship, and who eventually marries St. Peter's daughter, Rosalind. Outland dies in the Great War, devastating the entire family, not least St. Peter. For St. Peter, it seems, Outland's death signifies not only the loss of their shared intimacy, but the loss of a particular way of life, a mode of being: the anti-modern, indeed the primitive. Structurally peculiar when compared to the rest of Cather's oeuvre, she inserts "Tom Outland's Story," the young man's first-person account of his young life as a cowboy in the American Southwest (the "Blue Mesa," based on Cather's own travels to Mesa Verde in Colorado), into the narrative, immediately preceding St. Peter's climactic final refusal of the future in the third act. Cather would later invite readers to understand that insertion as an implicitly anti-modernist assertion:

In my book I tried to make Professor St. Peter's house rather overcrowded and stuffy with new things; American proprieties, clothes, furs, petty ambitions, quivering jealousies—until one got rather stifled. Then I wanted to open the square window [in the Professor's attic] and let in the fresh air that blew off the Blue Mesa, and the fine disregard of trivialities which was in Tom Outland's face and behaviour. (*On Writing* 31-32).

In their denial of American proprieties—and it is worth noting that those proprieties throughout the novel are associated with women and the feminine—Outland and St. Peter heroically, exceptionally refuse the stifling conditions of modernity. Those refusals, I will demonstrate, relate as much to their attachment to an idealized “primitive” state as they do to their homosocial and homoerotic relations. I thus want to consider, and indeed emphasize, two male-*female* attachments in the novel: that of Outland and “Mother Eve,” the mummified corpse of an indigenous woman with whom Outland imagines himself in a kinship relation, and that of St. Peter and Augusta, the St. Peter family seamstress whose domestic labor enables his retreat from the social.¹⁹ In so doing, I hope to illuminate the gendered and racial dimensions undergirding but obscured by queer critical attachments to the negative.

The queerness of Tom Outland's episode in the Blue Mesa has been well-trodden ground in Cather criticism. Indeed, this section offers examples aplenty of non-heteronormative intimacies, not least of which is the “happy family” Outland forms with Roddy Blake and Henry, “a wonderful cook and a good housekeeper” (*Professor* 195). Sedgwick has famously called this episode a “gorgeous homosocial romance” (*Tendencies* 173-4); and according to Scott Herring, it models a “Whitmanesque model of friendship” as opposed to “a recognizable subcultural idiom” of homosexual identity (“Catherian Friendship” 79). I do not wish to challenge such

readings so much as explore the logics by which this indicatively frontier narrative has come to be understood *only* in terms of its romantic homosociality. If Tom may be described as a queer figure by way of his male attachments, arguably less queer is his relentless will to knowledge, his will to name (perhaps foreshadowing his role as a scientist who would invent the “Outland vacuum” used by the U.S. military in the War that would ultimately kill him). Un-translatability and un-readability are so often the features of Cather’s queerest creations. And so when Tom encounters the Blue Mesa and attempts to catalogue, categorize, and systematize each of its objects and its mysteries, we sense one of the novel’s fundamental contradictions: *at the same time* he and his companions Roddy and Henry experience a homosocial—indeed romantic—relationship that refuses such naming, consolidation, justification, or explanation. While Thea Kronberg’s queer “touch across time” render present-day colonial propertied relations all but invisible, Tom Outland’s relentless will to know and to possess the Blue Mesa’s artifacts more explicitly marks him as a kind of colonial cowboy who attempts to tame and create out of the “empty” vastness of the Southwest (Dinshaw 21).

After Outland and his chums Roddy and Henry encounter the ruins of the Blue Mesa, Outland describes their process of categorization: “We numbered each specimen, and in my day-book I wrote down just where and in what condition we had found it, and what we thought it had been used for” (*Professor* 210). Speculations become facts, assumptions become knowledge: “One thing we knew about these people; they hadn’t built their town in a hurry. Everything proved their patience and deliberation” (211). In other words, everything proved their non-modernity: their simplicity, their past-ness, their primitivism.

Still, for Tom and Roddy, questions remain: “But what had become of them? What catastrophe overwhelmed them?” (*Professor* 212). These questions echo and contrast Tom’s own

fate: his own death in the catastrophe of the Great War. Father Duchene, the priest who resides near the Blue Mesa, offers answers to these questions; and though his reliability as a narrator-historian is at best suspect, the similarities between the fate of Duchene's Indians and that of both St. Peter and Outland suggest palpable relations between queerness and Indianness:

I see them there, isolated, cut off from other tribes, working out their destiny, making their mesa more and more worthy to be a home for man, purifying life by religious ceremonies and observances, caring respectfully for their dead, protecting the children, doubtless entertaining some feelings of affection and sentiment for this stronghold where they were once so safe and so comfortable, where they had practically overcome the worst hardships that primitive man had to fear. They were, perhaps, too far advanced for their time and environment.

They were probably wiped out, utterly exterminated, by some roving Indian tribe without culture or domestic virtues, some horde that fell upon them in their summer camp and destroyed them for their hides and clothing and weapons, or from mere love of slaughter. (219)

Like Tom, they embody simplicity. Like St. Peter, they have cut themselves off from "other tribes": this is both what makes them exceptional and spells their demise. They care for their home, a physical manifestation of their "culture" and "domestic virtues." They stand outside "their time and environment." They are ultimately imagined to be destroyed by a more powerful, less "cultured" tribe.

It is significant that Duchene's account seems to completely write off the possibility that the colonization of the American Southwest might have anything to do with the Indians' demise. That evasion, as well as Tom's will to possession, is confronted and challenged when he and his

companions Roddy and Henry come upon a dead body: the partially mummified corpse of an indigenous woman, whom critics John N. Swift and Joseph R. Uργο call “the heart of the matter...the center of ‘Tom Outland’s Story’ [and]...the center of *The Professor’s House*” (“Introduction” 5). Exploring what they name “Cliff City,” Tom, Roddy, and Henry are curious for a while to find evidence of human life:

At last we came upon one of the original inhabitants—not a skeleton, but a dried human body, a woman. She was not in the Cliff City; we found her in a little group of houses stuck up in a high arch we called the Eagle’s Nest. She was lying on a yucca mat, partly covered with rags, and she had dried into a mummy in that water-drinking air. We thought she had been murdered; there was a great wound in her side, the ribs stuck out through the dried flesh. Her mouth was open as if she were screaming, and her face, through all those years, had kept a look of terrible agony...Henry named her Mother Eve, and we called her that. (*Professor* 212-3)

Calling her Mother Eve, Henry—and Tom and Roddy following him—assign her a central role in their frontier narrative of discovery, narrate her, interpret her, read her, despite her silence, her refusal to signify. Calling her Mother Eve, they call forth narratives of Manifest Destiny that imagined the West as an Edenic prelapsarian paradise, narratives we saw deployed in Whitman, Dickinson, and Stoddard. Her body is taken up, interpreted, as a mother figure for this homosocial, non-reproductive “family”; she is a representative figure of things not named, the anti-modern, the “primitive,” figuring non-signification and Indianness as one of a piece. A mother in the sense that Christopher Nealon would call “affect-genealogies,” she reproduces

non-reproducibility through an imaginary that sutures indigenous bodies to the past—a past untouched by colonialism (despite St. Peter’s purported knowledge of just this history).

When the third section opens, St. Peter has rejected his family—and the future writ large—to live a solitary life of indifference, alone: “He was cultivating a novel mental dissipation—and enjoying a new friendship,” the narrator tells us. “Tom Outland had not come back again through the garden door (as he had so often done in dreams!), but another boy had: the boy the Professor had long ago left behind him in Kansas, in the Solomon Valley—the original, unmodified Godfrey St. Peter” (*Professor* 263). This narrative description highlights an important connection for discussions of queerness in the novel: “friendship,” I have already noted, described a nineteenth-century discourse of homosocial attachment. But here that homosocial attachment is to the self, and not just any self: the primitive self, the self-having-un-become. This “mental dissipation,” imagined in terms of an original self that is also a disintegration of the self, recalls un-coincidentally Tom’s discovery of the originary Mother Eve, who refuses translation, refuses to be read. That refusal has everything to do with her Indianness, which is also her atavism: “original, unmodified.” Indeed, the narrator explicitly states, “The Kansas boy who had come back to St. Peter this summer was not a scholar. He was a primitive. He was only interested in earth and woods and water...not nearly so cultivated as Tom’s old cliff-dwellers must have been—and yet he was terribly wise” (265). If his scholarship evinced a queer desire for colonial history (“Your children were born here. Not your daughters—your sons, your splendid Spanish-adventurer sons! I’m proud to be related to them, even by marriage,” St. Peter’s son-in-law tells him [162]) he transcends that queer (re)productive mode through dissipation, an imagined return to a “primitive” self. This notion of childhood as an innocent,

“primitive” ideal St. Peter shares with other fellow romantics of the nineteenth-century U.S. literary past, perhaps most notably Whitman. Recall this famous first stanza:

There was a child went forth every day;
And the first object he look'd upon, that object he became;
And that object became part of him for the day, or a certain part of the day, or for
many years, or stretching cycles of years.

(Whitman, *Poetry and Prose* 138)

Not unlike Tom's accumulation of artifacts in the Blue Mesa, in Whitman, the primitive self imperiously accumulates objects, transforming those objects into the self as a social being; St. Peter, on the other hand, takes a reverse route, forgoing all objects and relations in order to (un)become, to return to a state of childhood, which is also an imagined state of Indianness. In that dissipation, St. Peter detaches himself from his family and indeed “life” itself: “He did not regret his life, but he was indifferent to it. It seemed to him like the life of another person,” he contemplates (*Professor* 267); “I enjoy doing nothing,” he tells his doctor (269); and more to the point, “...‘Surely the saddest things in the world is falling out of love—if one has ever fallen in’” he tells himself; “Falling out, for him, seemed to mean falling out of all domestic and social relations, out of his place in the human family, indeed” (275). The discourse of “love” speaks, to St. Peter, to a larger discourse that attaches one to heteronormative relations that come to saturate sociality writ large: “the human family.” To be “human,” one must be part of “family.” By refusing such “love,” St. Peter becomes a primitive, which is to say he “un-becomes human.” This suggests that Indianness, as the narrative would have it, signals non-humanity.

St. Peter's “dissipation” culminates in an ambiguous scene of near-death. One night, a storm blows out the stove in his attic study and shuts the single attic window, filling the small

space with gas. (Recall the passage, quoted earlier, in which Cather states that the insertion of “Tom Outland’s Story” might “let in the fresh air that blew off the Blue Mesa” into the cramped domestic space of St. Peter’s attic.) He loses consciousness after contemplating whether it is worth the effort to get up from his bed and open the window. We are left to wonder whether St. Peter, indifferent to life, has chosen suicide or whether this is an accident. When St. Peter awakes, he discovers that he is alive because the German Catholic seamstress Augusta has saved him.

St. Peter’s “dissipation” resembles in many ways Lee Edelman’s assessment of “jouissance”: erotic pleasure that instantiates a rupture that tears at the fabric of the social. He offers as an example of this refusal the figure of the “*sinthomosexual*.” Edelman describes “*sinthomosexuality*” as such:

Sinthomosexuality...--denying the appeal of fantasy, refusing the promise of futurity that mends each tear, however mean, in reality’s dress with threads of meaning (attached as they are to the eye-catching lure we might see as the sequins of sequence, which dazzle our vision by producing the constant illusion of consequence)—offers us fantasy turned inside out, the seams of its costume exposing reality’s seamlessness as mere seeming, the fraying knots that hold each sequin in place now usurping that place. (*No Future* 35)

Readings of St. Peter’s dissipation often champion the social negativity of queerness in ways that link them to Edelman’s theory—even as they distance themselves from his work. But St. Peter remarkably evinces many of the characteristics of Edelman’s imaginary figure. He quite literally says “no” to a future, and he separates himself from his family who, against his wishes, seem to

pull him into a future—the social and economic relations—with which he does not want to engage.

Edelman's use of the costume metaphor is particularly appropriate for thinking about the relationship between St. Peter—heroic, masculine unraveling—and Augusta—weaving the seams of feminized “reality”/meaning, the very seams the *sinthomosexual* attempts to unravel. What the championing of St. Peter's “unraveling” misses is that that fantasy of unraveling the social depends upon that feminized labor; that labor sustains the *sinthomosexual*'s ability to indulge in this sovereign fantasy of refusing the present by disappearing (or “dissipating”) into the past in moments of *jouissance*. This labor, quite literally in the novel a “weaving,” stitches the *sinthomosexual* St. Peter to the fabric of the social that Edelman's queer (as well as St. Peter) denounces.²⁰ St. Peter's denial of the future does not so much deny the appeal of fantasy as it reveals that that denial itself is a fantasy.

Edelman's *sinthomosexual* is notably ambiguously “placed.” He has no place besides “outside” the social. So, too, does St. Peter imagine himself “outside,” especially when he is inside Tom's diary about the Southwest—the “outside” to “civilization.” But St. Peter is in a real place: “the Professor's House,” the space of his newly anti-familial occupation. And his place within that space depends on his relationship with Augusta, whose labor allows his detachment from his family and the future. “Augusta was like the taste of bitter herbs; she was the bloomless side of life that he had always run away from,—yet when he had to face it, he found that it wasn't altogether repugnant” (*Professor* 280). What is it, we might ask, that makes her the “bloomless side of life”—that drudgery that signals barrenness, decay? Deciding “He didn't, on being quite honest with himself, feel any obligations toward his family” he *does* feel “a sense of obligation toward [Augusta], instinctive, escaping definition, but real” (281). Perhaps this

obligation, apparently “escaping definition,” is that her labor—invisible yet undeniable—keeps him away from his family, outside of sociality, allows his escape into the imagined past.

St. Peter imagines Augusta to have a unique, particular relation to cyclical time, a relation he both depends upon and admires. Her commitment to Catholic ritual attaches her to St. Peter’s “primitive” childhood past; “You’ll never convert me back to the religion of my fathers now,” he tells her early in the novel (25). Her Catholicism and her Germanness mark her as “unassimilated”—indeed, in the early twentieth-century U.S., “queer” in the sense that both Germanness and Catholicism were seen as (sexually) suspect by many assimilated Americans and which the novel further emphasizes by making it unclear whether she herself has a family. She might be considered, in Christopher Nealon’s terms, one of Cather’s “foundlings,” characters orphaned from normative familial relations as well as historical time. Augusta remains, in St. Peter’s imagination as well as the novel’s, a relic of the past whose financial reliance on St. Peter allows him his escape from his family and the modernity to which they are associated.

In the novel’s opening, we see Augusta and St. Peter share a workspace filled with Augusta’s busts on which her unfinished dress-work hangs. In this space they share an intimacy that is inextricable from St. Peter’s family life: “She had been most at the house in the days when his daughters were little girls and needed so many clean frocks. It was in those very years that he was beginning his great work” (*Professor* 25-6). It also enables St. Peter’s detachment from his family: “[It] was the one place in the house where he could get isolation, insulation from the engaging drama of domestic life” (26). His escape from domestic drudgery, then, depends upon her work and her company—her affective labor. In the space of the attic, “patterns and manuscripts interpenetrated,” suggesting what St. Peter perceives to be their irreversible

entanglement (23). In a telling instance early on, Augusta tells him “When I first came to sew for Mrs. St. Peter, I never thought I should grow grey in her service” (23). His silent response: “What other future could Augusta possibly have expected?” (24). As Ian Bell has suggested, “Augusta is *in* the family but not *of* it: she is the exemplary figure of the novel’s general resistance to the biological and a ‘remedial influence’ who finally provides a necessary ‘comfort’ for St. Peter” (“Re-writing” 41). This description is apt for understanding not the novel’s challenges to heteronormativity (“resistance to the biological”) but how those challenges rely to a certain extent on the “in but not of” status of the novel’s less “exceptional” seamstress. In Bell’s reading of the novel, Augusta is the figure who allows St. Peter’s redemption, his entrance back into the social—but, relatedly I suggest, she is the figure who arguably allows his retreat in the first place.

At the novel’s end, St. Peter reflects, “There was still Augusta, however; a world full of Augustas, with whom one was outward bound” (*Professor* 281). Endlessly replaceable, replicable, this “world full of Augustas” constitutes the traffic in feminized labor—disparaged throughout the novel—that is the scaffolding of St. Peter’s sovereign fantasy of historical romance. In other words, Augusta tethers him, if not to his family, then to life. If Augusta is not figured as an idealized, primitivized Eve, she is nonetheless the foreign, primitive woman on whom St. Peter’s queer relation to the past depends. A seamstress, she herself participates in the “weaving” of St. Peter’s creation. At the novel’s end, we find St. Peter not re-entering the social, but in a kind of static temporal limbo: “He thought he knew where he was,” the narrator describes him ambiguously, in space if not a named, known place, “and that he could face with fortitude the *Berengaria* and the future” (283). Ambiguously positioned, he nonetheless,

however ambivalently, has the ability to say “yes” to the future while Augusta is imagined in endless repetition and Mother Eve remains a relic of the mummified past.

Conclusion: The Marker is Mute

On this beautiful, ever-changing land

--the historical marker says—

man fought to establish a home

(fought whom? the marker is mute.)

They named this Catherland, for Willa Cather,

lesbian—the marker is mute,

the marker white men set on a soil

of broken treaties, Indian blood,

women wiped out in childbirths, massacres—

for Willa Cather, lesbian,

whose letters were burnt in shame.

(Adrienne Rich, “For Julia in Nebraska,” lines 37-47)

In this powerful stanza written from 1978 to 1981, feminist poet Adrienne Rich expressly links the co-implicated discourses of American imperialism, misogyny, and homophobia. She points to competing narratives: the ones that empires repeat to themselves about heroic masculine conquest and “domestication,” and the ones that are muted by death, enforced silence, and erasure. It is here, in Catherland, and in the very figure of Willa Cather, Rich suggests, that we come face-to-face with those interrelated silences. It is Cather’s *shame*, significantly, that Rich invokes as evidence of that silence. But now that alternative accounts of Cather’s life are

available, ones that are significantly less marked by shame, anguish, and tortured secrecy, what do we do with those silences that still remain? And what does that mean for their implication with discourses of empire? Is there an inherent relationship between queer silence and the history of U.S. imperialism?

While I posit no easy answers to these questions, I conclude this chapter by pointing to two contemporary examples of attachments to Cather, which shed light on her singularly queer literary legacy. First, in her foundational *Bodies that Matter*, Judith Butler quotes the above Rich poem in her foundational essay on Cather: “It is perhaps less that the legibility of lesbianism is perpetually endangered in Cather’s text than that lesbian sexuality within the text is produced as a perpetual challenge to legibility. Adrienne Rich remarks on this challenge when she writes, ‘...for Willa Cather, lesbian—the marker is mute’” (170). I am intrigued by the moves that this citation of Rich citing Cather is making, establishing as it does a lesbian genealogy while emphasizing Cather’s “perpetual challenge” to any such establishment. Gone is the ashamed Cather that Rich imagined; Butler’s Cather is a queer challenger to gender and sexual normativities. I am intrigued, too, by Butler’s lack of concern with Rich’s crucial other “mute” “marker” pertaining specifically to U.S. empire. This is of course not to say that this absence in Butler’s selective citation constitutes an intentional evasion of matters of U.S. colonialism and imperialism present in Cather’s work and Rich’s poetic treatment of her; however, it is to suggest that queer theory’s prioritization of gender and sexual subversion can reinforce the exceptionalist narratives that U.S. colonialism and imperialism have long reiterated, exceptionalist narratives that depend on very particular silences.

More recently, there has been a resurgence of popular interest in Cather with the publication of her letters (imagined by many for so long to have been “burnt in shame,” in Rich’s

words) and the opening of the new National Willa Cather Center. In the October 2, 2017 issue of *The New Yorker*, the writer Alex Ross recounts his recent visit to the Willa Cather Memorial Prairie in Red Cloud, Nebraska. He attended the opening of the National Willa Cather Center, “a seven-million-dollar facility with a climate-controlled archive, apartments for scholars, museum exhibits, and a bookstore,” in June (32). Ross opens his essay, in true Catherian form, by describing Nebraska’s prairie landscape: “At the bottom [of a hill], you no longer see traces of modern civilization, though you can hear trucks on Route 281 as they clamber out of the Kansas flats. The land here was never plowed, and with careful cultivation it preserves the prairie as Cather roamed it, in the eighteen-eighties—an immemorial zone of grass, trees, birds, water, and wind” (32). To this day, “Cather’s” prairies are described in terms of this tension: they are a product of careful human preservation, but they retain the timeless “immemoriality” to which the outskirts of “civilization” allow one access. Quoting Jim Burden, the protagonist of *My Ántonia*, Ross describes this “immemorial zone” as engendering a sense of “obliterating strangeness” (33)—a phrase that encompasses some of the themes I have explored throughout chapter. Cather’s works, from her earliest writings to her most famous novels, explore “strange” attachments: to spaces, to times, to objects, to bodies. The obliquity of those attachments, and their refusals to cohere or be explained, yield many of the pleasures and demands of reading her work for queer critics and “lay readers” alike. And surely her work yields certain explainable and unexplainable attachments in her readers—queer and otherwise. For lesbian and gay critics, she was a brilliant (if problematic) forebear who buried lesbian desires in her (necessarily closeted) work. For queer critics, she troubles traditional sexual schemas that would foreclose endless lines of flight of desire and identification.

In Ross's *New Yorker* piece, he notes former U.S. First Lady Laura Bush's presence at the inauguration as the keynote speaker, marking Willa Cather's peculiar political place in the so-called American canon. Cather's work has been cast alternately as radically queer, deeply conservative, aggressively apolitical, and a host of other nominations. Laura Bush, for her part, "rightly said that Cather helped forge a Western identity" (33). Ross qualifies Bush's statement, revealing how differently Cather's work continues to be read, and how politicized those readings may be: "it was not the same West that male bards of empire extolled..." (33). To be sure, Cather did not fetishize or celebrate the eroticized conquest of "the West." However, as I have maintained throughout this dissertation, one need not celebrate U.S. settler colonialism in order to participate in its ongoing political effects, namely the ongoing naturalization of settler inhabitation. In Cather's queer protagonists' "becoming-Native"—their affective, sensational attachments to the always-already pastness of Native bodies—they adhere to narratives that cast settler occupancy in the U.S. as a necessary and inevitable consequence of modernity. In Ross's piece, it appears that for some readers, Catherland continues to induce such feelings of (un)becoming: "When you walk the Cather Prairie, you move not only backward in time but also out into symbolic terrain, one in which the self becomes a 'something,' in which a moment of supreme bliss is indistinguishable from death," Ross writes (33). Transposing Native lands "backward in time" into "symbolic terrain," Ross's essay suggests that some of Cather's readers continue to participate in fantasies of escape from the time of civilization—into "obliterating strangeness"—through the imagined endless possibilities enabled by untrammelled wilderness and its proximity to an ancient past. In this chapter, I have attempted to unsettle some of the fantasies that Cather's texts animate for her readers. These fantasies, even as they present

important challenges to normative modes of being, continue to draw from the logics of settler colonialism.

Coda
“Map of the Americas”:
Qwo-Li Driskill, Lyric Disidentification, and the Wild

Throughout this dissertation, I have explored the works of Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, Charles Warren Stoddard, and Willa Cather, in order to show how these authors articulated their desires for queer intimacies that produced alternatives to the identitarian homo-/hetero- binary. Integral to those alternatives, I have contended, was the colonial and imperial discourse of the “primitive,” which each of these authors—in distinct ways and toward different ends—attached to indigenous bodies and geographies beyond the borders of the U.S. nation-state. On one hand, these authors’ works index what Judith Butler has described as “disidentification”: the “uneasy sense of standing under a sign to which one does and does not belong” (*Bodies* 219). On the other, that disidentification performs a kind of identification with “otherness” that nonetheless adopts the very colonial discourses of the U.S. nation-state with which they disidentify. Explicating the pervasive trend of primitivist fantasies in the erotic imaginaries of queer non-Natives, my goal has been to bring to the discussion of white-authored queer texts the vital interventions of queer native studies and queer of color critique, fields that have saliently demonstrated not just the implicit, un-interrogated whiteness of much of queer theoretical inquiry but, importantly and relatedly, the ways in which “queerness” might be complicit with racist, colonialist, and imperialist national biopolitics. While that complicity has often been figured as the result of a relatively recent phenomenon under neoliberal capitalism, I have set out to show that this occurred (in obviously different ways under different historical conditions) around the very advent of the discursive consolidation of sexuality-as-identity in the United States. Unlike the more recent embrace of “homonationalism,” in which “‘acceptance’ and ‘tolerance’ for gay and lesbian subjects have become a barometer by which the right to and

capacity for national sovereignty is evaluated,” each of the authors I study (with the exception of Whitman) *did not* champion a national identity but nonetheless remained tethered to colonial fantasies of primitive otherness (Puar, “Rethinking Homonationalism” 336).

There are, as I stated in my introduction, limits to such an approach to this literature, which I would like to address in this coda more fully. By focusing on the colonial discourse of non-Native, mostly canonical texts, one runs the risk of reifying the very colonial binary one intends to de-naturalize. Such a critique, as I mentioned, has been mounted against Edward Said and other postcolonial critics that have focused on discourse produced by dominant cultures in the “West.” While I have tried, when applicable, to introduce the possibility of “diachronic forms of history and narrative” and “signs of instability” in the primitivist discourses I explored, this dissertation nonetheless remains open to the criticism that I posit very little in the way of decolonizing alternatives voiced by indigenous peoples (Bhabha 102). By way of conclusion, then, I want to return to the work of the poet with whom I began this dissertation, Qwo-Li Driskill—in particular, hir poem, “Map of the Americas.” I read this poem as a response to the problems I have explored throughout this dissertation, wherein non-Native authors “map” their queer desires onto Native bodies and lands. “Map of the Americas” performs a different kind of disidentification from that of those authors, one that “scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message’s universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications,” as José Muñoz has theorized the term in the context of queer artists and performers of color (*Disidentifications* 31). I read this poem as a lyric disidentification with queer non-Native epistemologies, working within canonical forms as a means to defamiliarize them by unequivocally inhabiting the role of a Cherokee Two-Spirit

subject/speaker. In “Map of the Americas,” Driskill combines the lyric address (crucial in the poetry of Whitman and Dickinson), as well as concrete poetry, in order to make visible the ways in which the history of non-Native colonial “mapping”—ways of seeing which are also ways of “knowing”—haunts queer intimacies in our own present.

“Map of the Americas” stages an erotic scene in which Driskill, through the lyric persona of an “I,” addresses a non-Native lover—and in so doing weaves together multiple and overlapping temporalities and topographies. Addressing a “you,” s/he draws a connection, not unlike Walt Whitman, between the intimacy of erotic relations and that of the writer and reader. In one stanza, s/he writes: “Sometimes I look at you/ and choke back sobs knowing/ you are here/ because so many of my people/ are not.” Here the erotic and the biopolitical converge; these lines lay bare the violent history without which this erotic moment would not have been possible. The poem begins, “I wish when we touch/ we could transcend history in/ double helixes of dark and light/ on wings we build ourselves.” Driskill’s lyric “I’s” desire to “transcend history” foregrounds just this point, merging the erotic (“touch”), the historical, and poetic form. Traditionally, the lyric often has been understood as an artistic attempt to achieve just this transcendence. And yet s/he deploys this generic mode to establish that impossible ideal’s very fictiveness. In Driskill’s deployment, lyric becomes a mode of ethical encounter: “othered” by the ongoing history of U.S. settler colonialism, s/he refuses to isolate sex with a non-native lover from that history. S/he demands accountability and in so doing asserts hir sovereignty. Driskill does this not only by calling forth history, but also by emphasizing the significance of “land” in that history: “But this land grows volcanic/ with the smoldering hum of bones.” This line looks to the past as well as to the present and the future, anticipating the possibility of a decolonized

future while insisting on the memory that informs that utopic possibility. These bones, s/he writes, are

All that's left
of men who watched beloveds
torn apart by rifles
Grandmothers singing back
lost families
Children who didn't live
long enough to cradle a lover
arms around waste
lips gently skimming nape
legs twined together
like a river cane basket

Driskill seamlessly moves from those lost by indigenous genocide to the poem's present of the erotic embracing caress, to the image of "a river cane basket." Tangled legs, in this moment of intimacy, become a Native American art form, a physical manifestation of the survival of Native American creative practices. While the stanza's lines separate native people from their intimate attachments—or the possibility of those attachments altogether—Driskill's repetition of "I" sounds perhaps functions to sonically weave these lines together.

Following the above stanza, Driskill returns to the direct address. "Look:," s/he tells his reader/lover addressee, calling attention to the significance of visibility, "my body curled and asleep/ becomes a map of the Americas." The following lines fill the entire second page of the poem:

My hair
 spread upon the pillow
 a landscape of ice My chest the plains
 and hills of this land My spine
 the continental divide
 my heart drums the
 rhythm of returning
 buffalo herds Do you
 notice the deserts
 and green
 mountains
 on my belly's
 topography
 or the
 way
 my
 hips
 rise
 like
 ancient pyramids
 My legs wrapped with the
 Amazon the Andes the Pampas
 the vast roads of the Incas
 here are the rainforests
 highlands
 stolen breath
 trapped deep
 in mine
 shafts and
 my feet
 that reach
 to touch
 Antarctica

This map initiates a moment of lyric rupture. Highlighting space—specifically, the map as a colonial technology—as crucial to the naturalization of settler colonialism, s/he throws the map back into the non-native face. S/he deploys this technology to suggest the possibility of its unraveling, claiming this space as hir own while emphasizing the present-ness of hir body. Rather than highlighting the territorial mapping of nations, s/he highlights the natural features of

the landscape, connecting hir body to those features—indeed, fusing body and land. In the only “you” s/he uses here, s/he asks, “Do you notice,” signaling multiple ways of seeing and perhaps the difficulty of untethering oneself to a settler relation to place.

Driskill is well aware that the fusing of body and land carries with it a great risk for a Native speaker. As we have seen, that conflation occurs, vis-à-vis the discourse of primitivism, throughout the non-Native queer literary history this dissertation has explored. But from Driskill’s vantage point, that conflation is not without a history (“stolen breath”), not without a constructed “form” (“my belly’s topography”). In short, through the invocation of the colonial technology of mapping, Driskill also calls forth the discourse of primitivism—typically romanticized as an atavistic past unavailable in modernity—to both highlight its unreality (its “social construction”) and to assert that primitivism itself has an ongoing history.

When Driskill returns to the lyric form, s/he continues to deploy this conflation: “When your hands travel/ across my hemispheres/ know these lands/ have been invaded before.” S/he continues, “and though I may quiver/ from your touch/ there is still a war.” In a rare use of rhyme, connecting “before” and “war,” Driskill connects hir body’s present to the land’s past; invasion carries with it the history of colonial violence that can’t be disentangled from the sexual violence—the invasion of the body—that was instrumental in that process.¹ Rather than refusing sexual pleasure, though, s/he invites it without evacuating hir insistence that “there is still a war” and that this moment does not render it moot: “These gifts could be misconstrued/ as worship/ Honor mistaken for surrender,” s/he writes later. Throughout, however, s/he lays claim to hir own “sovereign body”: a body with “flesh” that “burns with history,” returning us again to the land that “grows volcanic” with that history. In other words, hir invocation of the past does not isolate hir lyric “I”—a subject, a body, a land, a history—from the present; it announces a utopic

possibility, but one that requires of non-native queer subjects an active acknowledgement of “our” past’s troubling entanglements with U.S. colonialism and imperialism, arguably from the very inception of what has come to be called “gay and lesbian American history.”

Throughout this dissertation, I have explored a handful of literary forms: most obviously, the poetry of Walt Whitman, the letter-poems of Emily Dickinson, the travel-sketches of Charles Warren Stoddard, and the novels and essays of Willa Cather. It has been my implicit assumption throughout that these texts each absorb, adopt, produce, and reproduce not just literary forms but social forms as well. Recently, Caroline Levine has urged literary scholars to expand our definition of “form” in order to think not just about a dialectical relation between literary form and historical-social “context,” but to develop a more precise vocabulary for understanding the “forms” of social institutions. Oddly, that more precise vocabulary depends on the broadening of the definition of form: “an arrangement of elements—an ordering, patterning, or shaping” (3). Such a broadening, she argues, has a political impetus: “It is the work of form to make order. And this means that forms are the stuff of politics. Drawing on the work of Jacques Rancière, I define politics as a matter of distributions and arrangements” (3). The vocabulary of “distributions and arrangements,” I suggest, brings our attention not only to the politics of form and the form of politics, but the biopolitics of form and the form of biopolitics. Recall Foucault’s formulation of a crucial aspect of biopolitics: “power is situated and exercised at the level of life, the species, the race, and the large-scale phenomena of population” (*History of Sexuality* 137). If Dana Luciano has argued that in the nineteenth-century U.S. the arrangement of *time* has been crucial for the arrangement (or “management”) of those populations, we might extend this formulation, drawing on Levine’s definition of form, to the imagined arrangement of socio-

geographical space. It is just these interwoven “forms” that Driskill’s poem both illuminates and challenges.

Strangely enough, as I have been thinking through the significance of Driskill’s lyric address, I have found myself compelled back to criticism devoted to the lyric in Emily Dickinson, and to two works: Sharon Cameron’s *Lyric Time: Dickinson and the Limits of Genre* (1979) and Virginia Jackson’s *Dickinson’s Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading* (2005). I want to briefly discuss these works as a way to elucidate what Driskill is and is not doing within the tradition of the lyric. While they differ greatly, each is interested in reading Dickinson as a means to theorize the genre of the lyric. And for both, “time” and “history” become crucial to those theorizations. Cameron is interested in the strange simultaneous temporalities of Dickinson’s lyrics: “There is frequently in the poems a time not present that haunts the present as it haunts the speakers’ minds,” she writes, “confusing its dominance in memory or dream with a prediction about the future, mistaking itself for prophecy. *The present, then, the ‘time’ of Dickinson’s poems, is overwhelmed by the promise of another, more satisfactory, order that will destroy time altogether*” (2, emphasis mine). We might, following Theodore Adorno, call this the utopic possibility of lyric form (Adorno 39). In the context of Driskill, we might, following José Muñoz, call this the utopic time of a queerness that is not yet here, a horizon of possibility (*Cruising Utopia* 1). For Cameron, the possibility of multiple temporalities, the explosion of a linear temporal arrangement within an organized structure, allows the Dickinsonian lyric “I” to “...dwell in Possibility -/ A fairer House than Prose -/ More numerous of Windows -/ Superior – for Doors –” (Fr466). “Possibility,” here implicitly likened to poetry by its negative relation to “Prose,” is a “fairer House,” but it is still, nonetheless, a house: a structure, a form.

In a quite different way, Virginia Jackson understands the lyric genre as a kind of modern “invention,” the consolidation of multiple nineteenth-century poetic “forms” under the umbrella term, “lyric.” Her aim is to identify, through the publication history of Dickinson’s verse, how changing practices of reading shaped and were shaped by changing definitions of the “lyric.” What is at stake here, for our purposes, is the idea that a lyric “I” shifts alongside “modern” conceptions of subjectivity, but that the form also contains a history of alternative possibilities. Juxtaposing the lyric form with concrete poetry, I suggest, Driskill destabilizes the lyric “I” from the vantage point of a subject within a population whose personhood has historically, violently been denied.

With Driskill’s disidentificatory poetics in mind, I want to turn finally to a recent development in queer studies: the utopian turn toward “the Wild.” Its proponents (Jack Halberstam, Tavia Nyong’o, Peter Coviello, among others) see this turn as integral to a re-framing of the possibilities of a radical queer politics. Halberstam describes its impetus concisely:

The wild is a term that came about when people like myself, José Muñoz, and...Tavia Nyong’o began to feel that the word ‘queer’ was exhausted, that we were making it do too much work critically and conceptually, and that when queerness becomes an umbrella for everyone who wants to get married, then you have to move onto a new term... The question asked by the category of the wild is whether we can return human life forms not simply to a more eco-friendly form of co-existence with other life forms on the planet, but also reproduce the terms under which unpredictability can thrive.” (*Youtube*)

Why “the Wild?” I should note that I am absolutely sympathetic to the goal—one that I think has been integral to queer inquiry for some time now—to call into question categories of the human (to which queer studies is deeply indebted to black studies) and to create the possibilities for the “unpredictability” of social and sexual forms.² Halberstam describes the drive behind “the wild” as a rejection of the normativization of “queerness,” one that he shorthands as gay and lesbian marriage. He lays claim to who and what gets to be called “queer,” rejecting the possibility that “unpredictability” can emerge out of homonormativity, a concept that has been important for queer theory’s grappling with the contradictions inherent in “queerness” but one that is also hardly totalizing to the subjects who partake in such trappings. While I am, along with Halberstam, skeptical of a “queer theory without antinormativity,” I do question the assumption that we (that is, queer theorists) already know in advance what queerness is and isn’t, or that nonnormative forms of sociality and sexuality are impossible within “normative” relations.³ Most significantly, though, I am skeptical of a mode of thought that skirts—even as it acknowledges—its primitivist framing.

Almost without exception, in each of the essays published that has proposed this turn, the authors acknowledge that framing without interrogating or historicizing it. In another essay, Halberstam briefly describes its colonial inheritance, explaining that wildness has historically belonged to a discursive matrix that included barbarism, savagery, and civilization’s opposite. He nevertheless offers a defense:

“Wild,” in a modern sense, has been used to signify that which lies outside of civilization and modernity. It has a racialized valence and a sense of anachronism. It is a tricky word to use but it is a concept that we cannot live without if we are to combat the conventional modes of rule that have synced

social norms to economic practices and have created a world order where every form of disturbance is quickly folded back into quiet, where every ripple is quickly smoothed over, where every instance of eruption has been tamped down and turned into new evidence of the rightness of the status quo. (“Go Gaga” 126)

To only go so far as to acknowledge that “the wild” is “a tricky word to use” borders on the dangerously dismissive. Nevertheless, Halberstam claims, it is necessary for an anti-assimilationist politics in which “disturbance” remains on the outskirts of state nationalism as a permanent but ever-evolving force.

Peter Coviello, whose work has been crucial for the conceptualization of this dissertation, has also recently turned to “the wild” to build upon the claims he proposed in *Tomorrow’s Parties* and to frame them more explicitly in the register of biopolitics. Offering a brief anecdotal history of queer studies, Coviello uses “the wild” as a metaphor for queer sex: “A lot of us...have loved the wild by trying to imagine ourselves toward positions that might summarily be described as sex-positive or pro-sex or sex-radical” (“Wild” 511). Like Halberstam, who proposes that “queer,” through its mainstream relative acceptance and academic institutionalization, has in recent years lost its political bite and its analytical purchase, Coviello urges us to widen—to expand—our ideas about what constitutes “sexuality,” to imagine eroticisms and socialities that challenge or evade state-sanctioned and –endorsed “intimacies.” Coviello presents this “wilding” as a necessary next step, an advancement, for scholars invested in radical queer politics. In another essay, Tavia Nyong’o also advances a critical widening: “Wildness pulls focus away from the human, bringing into sharper relief a background of a pulsing, vital, even queer materiality. Through a ‘free and wild creation of concepts,’ as Deleuze once called for, this new ecological and materialist thought zooms out from human ‘species

being' (as Marx termed it) to access a fuller sweep of events at a planetary and even cosmic level" ("Little Monsters" 258). Like Coviello, Nyong'o draws on a theoretical tradition that produces what Sedgwick called, in the context of the history of sexuality, a narrative of inevitable supersession from Marxism to Deleuzianism to substantiate "the wild's" necessity: if queer theory frequently fails the challenge to think beyond the human despite their efforts, "the wild" promises a more expansive vocabulary, a wider lens, to what ends we know not. As I have worked on queer literary figures of the past who have similarly advanced alternatives to sexual codification, pathologization, and normativization through the rhetoric of "widening" and "expanding" outside the bounds of hegemonic identity categories, I find in these articulations of a turn to "the wild" something uncannily familiar: with the supposed normativization of "queerness," queer theorists are now pointing to an unknown future through the language of the atavistic past and the search for a "beyond" rendered in geographical terms. In Nyong'o's essay, he importantly critiques posthumanism's desire to "decenter the human," invoking a central question in black studies: "have we ever been human? And if not, what are we being asked to decenter, and through what means?" (266). One might extend this question, however, to the problem that I argue lies at the crux of the new turn toward "the wild." In Native studies, the question might be reframed as such: "have we ever been 'civilized?' And if not, what are we being asked to make 'wild,' and through what means?"

Qwo-Li Driskill's image of "legs twined together/ like a river cane basket" in "Map of the Americas" points us toward one possible response. I think of this image, perhaps even more so than the map, as the poem's well-wrought urn containing "the smoldering hum of bones."⁴ For Driskill, the image of this basket has been central to her activist and scholarly work. Part of a growing body of scholars who have challenged queer studies' inattention to indigenous lives and

histories, s/he uses the rhetorical trope of “double weaving,” the method by which river cane baskets are made by Cherokee and other southeastern nations, to describe the relation between Native and queer studies s/he hopes to augment: “Native and queer studies, when conceptualized as intertwined walls of a doublewoven basket, enable us to see the numerous splints—including Native politics, postmodern scholarship, grassroots activisms, queer and trans resistance movements, queer studies, and tribally specific contexts—from which these critiques are (and can be) woven” (“Doubleweaving Two Spirit Critiques” 74). Hir image of “legs twined together” in “Map of the Americas”—one that is haunted through overlapping temporalities by the “Children who didn’t live/ long enough to cradle a lover”—offers just such an example of what the interweaving s/he proposes might look like. While it is not my intention to reject wholesale the queer theoretical turn toward “the Wild,” I do think of the literary history this dissertation discusses as a potent reminder of the pitfalls of primitivist fantasies—even those in the name of a radical politics—that treat “the Wild” as a symbol or metaphor for utopic possibilities. If “the Wild” poses a will toward a formless imaginative “beyond,” Driskill’s “mapping” of hir body while insisting on its sovereignty and hir image/trope of the doublewoven basket reveal the continued significance of overlapping and intertwining social and aesthetic forms—and the importance of historicizing those forms—to the ongoing project of theorizing a radical queer politics.

ENDNOTES

INTRODUCTION

¹ Patrick Wolfe contrasts “settler colonialism” with “colonialism” because “settler colonies were not primarily established to extract surplus value from indigenous labour. Rather, they are premised on displacing indigenes from (or *replacing* them on) the land” (1). This has been, and still is, a defining aspect of the U.S. political economy, and one that is naturalized for many non-Natives, engendering “quotidian affective formations” that normalize “settler presence, privilege, and power, taking up the terms and technologies of settler governance as the animating context for nonnatives’ engagement with the social environment” (Rifkin, *Settler Common Sense* xv). One crucial aspect of settler governance, as many queer native scholars have argued, has been the differentiation of normative and non-normative sexualities. See especially Andrea Smith, “Queer Theory and Native Studies: The Heteronormativity of Settler Colonialism.”

Judith Butler’s famous account of gender performativity in *Gender Trouble* is deeply informed by a revision of Freudian, Lacanian, and French feminist psychanalytic theory. A recent turn in queer theory espouses an embrace of negativity, or the Freudian “death drive” attached to queerness in heteronormative societies. Leo Bersani’s “Is the Rectum a Grave?” and Lee Edelman’s *No Future* are this move’s most widely cited texts. I invoke Achille Mbembe’s essay, “Necropolitics,” as a way to suggest some implicit connections between the “death drive” and settler colonialism.

² I am thinking here of Butler’s work on gender melancholia, and her use of drag therein, in *Gender Trouble* and elsewhere.

³ Gerald Vizenor, the Native American scholar who coined the term, writes “Survivance is an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry” (1).

⁴ My use of the term “borderlands” as a guiding theme throughout this dissertation is intentionally somewhat flexible. At times I invoke terms that have an unmistakably colonial history (like “frontier”), using quotations to highlight its constructed-ness. At times I point to the lines imagined to divide sovereign nations (like the U.S.-Mexico border). Always underlying my usage, though, are Gloria Anzaldúa’s “borderlands theory” as well as Mary Louise Pratt’s concept of the “contact zone.” Paul Jay describes the significance of their work as having “helped focus attention on how identities, cultures, and nations are produced, fractured, and continually reproduced within spaces or locations where there are no fixed borders or absolutes, where previously constructed ‘essences’ are deployed, transformed, and reconstructed into cultural spaces whose very nature is defined by their contingency and constructedness” (*Global Matters* 76).

⁵ Even as I am primarily concerned with the social construction of “the native” and “the natural,” I do not ignore that “whiteness” is also a socially constructed identity category. While an extensive body of work has been written on this topic, David Roediger’s *The Wages of Whiteness* and especially Toni Morrison’s *Playing in the Dark* have been informative for this project.

⁶ Most notably for our purposes, Ann Laura Stoler’s *Race and the Education of Desire* notes the unacknowledged significance of European colonialism to Foucault’s history of the development of modern categories and theories of sexuality. Americanists in particular have

noted the discrepancies between European and U.S. histories, including but not limited to Molly McGarry, Peter Coviello, and Christopher Looby. Mark Rifkin's *When Did Indians Become Straight?* situates the history of sexuality in the U.S. in the context of a specifically U.S. settler colonialism.

⁷ Sedgwick critiques David Halperin's *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality* in this regard. Theoretical questions around temporality, chronology, and historiography remain contentious within queer studies. A number of scholars have questioned the utility of linear chronologies of sexuality, asking instead about historians' own affective investments in the past and relations with archives across time. Carolyn Dinshaw's account of "touches across time" (*Getting Medieval*), Heather Love's method of "feeling backward," and Elizabeth Freeman's theorization of "erotohistoriography" (*Time Binds*) have been especially influential. But some scholars maintain the significance of chronology (which, they would contend, is not to say linearity or teleology) in the history of sexuality. See Valerie Traub's defense of historicism in queer studies and a highly critical survey of "unhistoricism" in "The New Unhistoricism in Queer Studies." See also Christopher Looby's recent essay, "The Literariness of Sexuality: or, How to Do the (Literary) History of (American) Sexuality," for a sophisticated literary approach to this question that also aligns with Traub's defense of historicism. For a (rather funny) response to Traub's indictment, see Halberstam's *Bully Bloggers* post, "Game of Thrones: The Queer Season" (8 April 2013).

⁸ Other than those texts mentioned in the previous footnote, some other texts that have been crucial to my understanding of the temporal and historical significance of primitivism in an indicatively queer register include (but are not limited to) Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*; Luciano, *Arranging Grief*; José Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*; Christopher Nealon,

Foundlings; Valerie Rohy, *Anachronism and Its Others*; and Kathryn Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child*.

⁹ In diverse ways, a great deal of work has made this latter point. Some of the most instructive work for me has been Roderick Ferguson's *Aberrations in Black*, Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman's *Against the Closet*, Siobhan Somerville's *Queering the Color Line*, Chandan Reddy's *Freedom with Violence*, and Sharon P. Holland's *The Erotic Life of Racism*.

¹⁰ I add my voice to what is now a wide-ranging group of scholars who question the inherent radicalism of "queer." To quote Lisa Duggan, "[Beginning] with Licia Fiol-Matta's *Queer Mother for the Nation*, published in 2002, much new work in queer studies abandoned the notion that queer identities or practices are somehow inherently radical, or that queer politics is necessarily oppositional to historical forms of political and economic power" ("Queer Complacency"). I would suggest that such a scholarly abandonment began even earlier with Cathy Cohen's now classic essay, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?".

¹¹ My account of the social construction of space is influenced by Henri Lefebvre's foundational *The Production of Space*, Foucault's "Of Other Spaces," as well as Edward Said's *Orientalism*. The centrality of "the co-presence of discrepant...incompatible geographies within the United States" in native studies scholarship lies at the heart of this dissertation (Rifkin, *Manifesting America* 22).

¹² By drawing these connections, I do not mean to suggest that the terms "native" and "foreign" simply did not exist before the time period under investigation here, from the publication of Walt Whitman's 1860 *Leaves of Grass* to Willa Cather's *The Professor's House* in 1925; however, I do argue that it was around this time period that in the U.S. their meanings

began to be understood in naturalized, biologicistic terms. In making this argument, I extend Somerville's account of the biologization of "race" in terms of the black/white binary in the U.S. at this historical moment.

¹³ See his important if highly contested work, *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism* (1995), for an elaboration of this idea. His chapter "The Vanishing American," pp. 29-39, is especially pertinent to this discussion.

¹⁴ In "Africa and the Epiphany of Modernism," Simon Gikandi addresses the problem of "primitivist art" in European modernism, and aims "to shift emphasis from the figure of the primitive to the process by which the monumentalization of modernism came to negate the very radical alterity that was its condition of possibility" (34). He implicitly takes Torgovnik to task not only for ignoring those processes but for evading the political violence undergirding primitivist discourses.

¹⁵ For a survey of transnational approaches in border studies, see Paul Jay's *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies*, especially Chapter Four, "Border Studies: Remapping the Locations of Literary Study," 73-90. Jay notes Native American critic Louis Owens's use of Mary Louise Pratt's concept of the "contact zone" as a way to understand the American "frontier" (and, in turn, Native American literary production) in more multifaceted "transcultural" modes than the European/Indian binary that remains influential (qtd in Jay 76).

¹⁶ As we will see, both Stoddard and Cather glean their interest in primitivism through their readings of and responses to Whitman. Dickinson, the only exception, was somewhat aware of his presence, famously writing in her second letter to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "You speak of Mr Whitman - I never read his book - but was told that he was disgraceful -" (*Letters* 173).

¹⁷ Notably, Smith positions Whitman as a central figure in this tradition, naming him “the poet who gave final imaginative expression to the theme of manifest destiny” (44). Primitivism also figures into Smith’s survey of this theme. In a chapter on Daniel Boone, Smith suggests that he is both an “empire builder” and a “philosopher of primitivism” (51).

¹⁸ For Foucault’s theorizations of discourse and power, foundational to his work on sexuality, see *The Archeology of Knowledge* and *Discipline and Punish*.

¹⁹ See his *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, as well as *State of Exception*.

²⁰ “Intersectionality” refers to, in Jennifer Nash’s words, “the notion that subjectivity is constituted by mutually reinforcing vectors of race, gender, class, and sexuality” (“Re-thinking Intersectionality” 2). While Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term in her classic 1991 essay, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color,” Nash argues rightly that intersectional analysis and critique has been central to black feminist thought long before the publication of Crenshaw’s essay (3). In *Terrorist Assemblages*, Jasbir Puar has sought to reframe intersectionality as “assemblage”: “As opposed to an intersectional model of identity, which presumes that components—race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, age, religion—are separable analytics and can thus be disassembled, an assemblage is more attuned to interwoven forces that merge and dissipate time, space, and body against linearity, coherency, and permanency” (212).

²¹ Two very recent examples of work that connects nineteenth-century U.S. literature and theories of biopolitics include Kyla Schuller’s *The Biopolitics of Feeling* and Peter Coviello’s article, “The Wild Not Less Than the Good: Thoreau, Sex, Biopower,” which builds upon his work in *Tomorrow’s Parties* by positioning it in a biopolitical register.

²² See Povinelli’s *The Empire of Love*.

²³ Historian George Chauncey has also made this point in *Gay New York*.

²⁴ In making this suggestion, I echo Jasbir Puar who argues in *Terrorist Assemblages* that “exceptionalism is a founding impulse, indeed the very core of a queerness that claims itself as an anti-, trans-, or unidentity” (22). As such, “Queerness...is the modality through which ‘freedom from norms’ becomes a regulatory queer ideal that demarcates the ideal queer” (22). In our contemporary moment, she argues, “queerness as exceptional...is wedded to individualism and the rational liberal humanist subject” (22). By constructing a “queer canon,” I argue, we reinforce ideas about queerness’s exceptionality—or “ideal queers”—that risks evading its political complicities and complacencies.

²⁵ See Robin Hackett, *Sapphic Primitivism*; Somerville; Rohy; and Abdur-Rahman.

CHAPTER ONE

¹ At the time that he was fired from his post, the Secretary of the Interior, William T. Otto, reported to Whitman that “he had seen on Mr. Harlan’s desk a volume of *Leaves of Grass*, in blue paper covers, and the pages of the poems marked more or less throughout the work” (in

With Walt Whitman in Camden, vol. 3, 475). These “blue paper covers” indicate that this edition was Whitman’s “Blue Book”—his personal, annotated copy of the 1860 *Leaves of Grass*.

² For accounts of the brief time Whitman spent at the Bureau, see Gay Wilson Allen, *The Solitary Singer: A Critical Biography of Walt Whitman*, 344-350; Justin Kaplan, *Walt Whitman: A Life*, 303-306; and Jerome Loving, *Walt Whitman: The Song of Himself*, 283-295, and *Walt Whitman’s Champion: William Douglass O’Connor*, 54-65.

³ I will mark all citations of Whitman from the third edition of *Leaves of Grass* as “Third.” I derive all other citations from the Justin Kaplan-edited collection, *Poetry and Prose*. Other sources are otherwise specified.

⁴ In arguing that Whitman places his sexual themes at the forefront of his third edition, I am avoiding broad claims about Whitman’s career trajectory vis-à-vis his sexual politics. These concerns fall outside the purview of my discussion here. It is worth noting, however, the range of readings gay, queer, and feminist critics have offered: some claim that Whitman reaches the peak of his sexual-political radicalness and subsequently becomes more conservative (the common narrative). M. Jimmie Killingsworth notes a “progressive chastening of Whitman’s sexual politics and the corresponding changes in his poetics” from the first edition onward (xix). See his *Whitman’s Poetry of the Body*.

⁵ For brief but illuminating twentieth-century histories of homophobic Whitman criticism, see Martin, 3-8, and Erkkila. As Erkkila notes, this tradition “has insisted on silencing, spiritualizing, heterosexualizing, or marginalizing Whitman’s sexual feelings for men” (153). In her 1994 essay, “Whitman and the Homosexual Republic,” she also takes many gay critics to task for having “tended to maintain a distinction between Whitman the private poet and Whitman the public poet, Whitman the homosexual poet and Whitman the poet of democracy, that unduly

privatizes and totalizes Whitman's sexual feeling for men" (153). Instead, she argues that the public and the private, the political and the erotic cannot be disentangled, and that that entanglement is central to Whitman's poetics.

⁶ Anca Parvulescu's recent *The Traffic in Women's Work* argues that "...Edelman works with a narrow understanding of reproduction as procreative heteronormativity, to which he opposes the queer death drive, a negativity that resists any social vision and future. Marxist and materialist feminist theories of reproduction, on the other hand, remind us that we all, Edelman's death-driven queer man included, engage in reproductive work and behaviors...As long as he continues to live, even within the horizon of the death drive, the queer man reproduces himself from day to day, from one second to the next. To not pay attention to the political economy of reproduction is a luxury that queer theory cannot afford" (11). While some might take issue with my invocation of Edelman here as anachronistic, I nonetheless see Edelman's theoretical paradigm as a confrontation with progressive teleologies of modernity that emerged in the nineteenth century, a progressiveness that Whitman fully, if queerly, embraced.

⁷ My focus on "quotidian" articulations of queer intimacy and belonging is influenced also by Rifkin's work, as he is invested in theorizing the ways in which settler colonialism might be "naturalized" in those articulations.

⁸ See Weinberg; Clark; Grunzweig; and Folsom.

⁹ One cannot help but note the irony, then, that James Harlan's outrage toward Whitman's copy of *Leaves* was based on moral (in this case, religious) grounds. Indeed, we might agree with J. Hubley Ashton who told Harlan that his "theory of the book...was not consistent with the intention of W. W. or the rest of the drift of the book" (Traubel 472).

¹⁰ They were also economic. By alluding to “the market” and its need “to be supplied,” Whitman also points to the economic dimension of his project. “Land,” which the dissemination of his work would accumulate, becomes through claiming and naming, capitalist agricultural land, private property, colonized space.

¹¹ It is not clear whether Whitman would have read or known *A Plea for the West*, but he was aware of Beecher, having attended his sermons in New York City.

¹² As Jason Stacy argues, “Proto-Leaf” “[frames] a cosmos” (xxiii, emphasis mine). Establishing its rhetorical connection to the Book of Genesis, Stacy suggests that the poem’s first stanza, whose first and last lines are “Fresh, free, savage/ Solitary singing in the west, I strike up for a new world,” “[appeals] to original creation and unencumbered living... ‘Proto-Leaf,’ like Genesis, [establishes] the parameters for the rest of the stories, visions, and exhortations: past and future [collapse] in the poet’s seminal nature as he [guides] the reader *back* to a new world” (xxiii).

¹³ See Kinkead-Weeks for a fuller account of this temporal mode in Whitman’s poetry.

¹⁴ It is worth noting that Whitman does not capitalize the word “west” in the 1860 edition. In later editions, he would do so with regularity. This suggests a marked historical shift in the concept’s definitions: in the yet “unsettled” “west” of this edition, the word carries, to my mind, more amorphous symbolic meanings, whereas the later “West” assumes that the act of settling has not only occurred but stabilizes its geographic and ideological meanings.

¹⁵ In another memorable moment, Whitman positions himself in the South—specifically Alabama (*Third* 14). This, along with his references to Canada, Cuba, and Mexico, suggest that his nationalist-expansionist vision was not only directed westward but in other directions as well. However, Whitman’s reference to Alabama also highlights his hope for the unification of North

and South on the cusp of the Civil War—a unification that he believed national expansion might enable.

¹⁶ I mark heterosexuality in quotations because the term “heterosexual” was not, in 1860, an established identity category. It is commonly understood by scholars of sexuality that the category “homosexual” in fact preceded “heterosexual.” The “heterosexual” is a twentieth-century Western invention.

¹⁷ For three brilliant discussions of nineteenth-century U.S. discourses of teleological modernity and the “death of the Indian” see Bergland, Luciano, and McGarry.

¹⁸ This is Ed Folsom’s insight. See “Whitman and American Indians” in *Walt Whitman’s Native Representations*, 80-88. Whitman’s poem might invite a contrast to the popular poet Lydia Huntley Sigourney, whose poem “Indian Names” insisted on the ethical challenge to “modernity” presented by the embeddedness of “Indian” nomenclature on the land. There the temporality of Indian presence is far more complex. On one hand, Native Americans seem to have all but “disappeared”; on the other, she signals ongoing disputes and violence. Never, though, is their death presented as the inevitable sign of American progress.

¹⁹ For an annotated bibliography on Whitman and phrenology, see the *Walt Whitman Archive*:
http://www.whitmanarchive.org/archive1/classroom/student_projects/raglas/a_bibliography.htm.

²⁰ My readings align with (albeit for different purposes and with different emphases) Betsy Erkkila’s, who writes in “Whitman and the Homosexual Republic,” “the ‘Children of Adam’ poems do not read as a neatly heterosexual counterpart to his poems of passion for men in the ‘Calamus’ sequence” (160).

²¹ For example, O. S. Fowler finds on Native American skulls “an extreme development of destructiveness, secretiveness, and cautiousness... Their extreme destructiveness would create a cruel, blood-thirsty, and revengeful disposition—a disposition common to the race—which, in connexion with their moderate or small benevolence, would make them turn a deaf ear to the cries of distress, and steel them to such acts of barbarity as they are wont to practice in torturing the hapless victims of their vengeance.” (*Proved* 29). See also the phrenological diagram that John D. Davies includes in the frontispiece to his classic study, *Phrenology: Fad and Science*. This diagram, along an evolutionary scale, compares the “development” of certain species. According to this diagram, the order of development is thus: the snake, the dog, the elephant, the ape, the human idiot, the bushman, the uncultivated, the improved, the civilized, the enlightened, and the Caucasian, labeled as “highest type.” For a bibliography on historical phrenology, see the *Walt Whitman Archive*:

http://www.whitmanarchive.org/archive1/classroom/student_projects/raglas/h_bibliography.htm

²² This is less true of the more “urban” poems of the “Calamus” cluster—for example, poem 18 (later re-named “City of Orgies”). But in contrast to many critics, I argue that Whitman’s “Calamus” cluster (along with the rest of the 1860 *Leaves*) places far more emphasis on a *retreat* from urban space than the relishing in its potential pleasures.

²³ Biopolitical theory offers a rich vocabulary for interrogating questions of inclusion and exclusion of a given body politic. Through the figure of the *homo sacer*, Agamben claims that the sovereignty of “the State” depends upon “bare life.” “Bare life,” he writes, “remains included in politics in the form of the exception, that is, as something that is included solely through exclusion” (*Homo Sacer* 11). It is, as Anca Parvulescu has described it, “life stripped of its human qualifications, depersonalized, and depoliticized” (*Traffic* 71). Agamben theorizes this

political status/non-status through the Nazi concentration camp: “the pure, absolute, and impassable biopolitical space (insofar as it is founded solely on the state of exception)...the hidden paradigm of the political space of modernity” (*Homo Sacer* 123). Many scholars have developed and critiqued this provocative claim, addressing other modes of sovereignty, other states of exception, whose differences are shaped by complex — often interrelated — national and global histories.²³ For our purposes, Mark Rifkin complicates Agamben’s “state of exception” by bringing to bear the quasi-citizen status of native peoples in the U.S. context. Interpreting nineteenth-century and more recent legal U.S. discourses alongside Agamben, Rifkin analyzes the “peculiar” status of native nations and peoples: they are both of, and not of, the state, and their struggles for national sovereignty threaten the self-evidence of U.S. sovereignty and geopolitical goals. Rifkin argues that “the supposedly underlying sovereignty of the U.S. settler-state is a retrospective projection generated by, and dependent on, the ‘peculiar’-ization of Native peoples” (“Indiginizing Agamben” 91). While Rifkin focuses here on U.S. legal discourse, other nineteenth-century U.S. discourses contributed to the “peculiar”-ization of native peoples, one of which was popular science, and particularly, phrenology.

²⁴ This was not uncommon in nineteenth-century American culture. For an illuminating account of their entanglements, see McGarry.

²⁵ In *Settler Common Sense*, Mark Rifkin makes a similar point about the “queer individualism” of Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden*. He argues, “...Thoreau’s account of individual identity freed from the quotidian imperatives of market-oriented means of work and ways of sustaining a household emphasizes time for imagination, non(re)productive modes of bodily expenditure, and the restorative possibilities of being alone. From this perspective, *Walden* articulates a queer conception of personhood.” But, “*Walden* offers a vision of

individuality that depends upon its immersion in a location apart, constructing a form of selfhood that has attributes of sovereignty that make it immune to nationalism and the jurisdictional claims of the state. In this way, personhood in the text becomes *Indian-like* in its occupancy of this pristine, extrapolitical locale” (93).

²⁶ Recent historical work has shown that queer intimacies were very real features of the “American frontier” social and geographic landscape. See Boag.

²⁷ I derive this concept from Mary Louise Pratt’s 1991 article, “Arts of the Contact Zone.” While I have insisted on maintaining use of the term “frontier” in relation to Whitman, I do so because I believe it conceptually most closely resembles Whitman’s understanding of and poetic treatment of U.S. borderlands and contact zones. This understanding/treatment has a long imperialistic history and contains within it the supposition of inevitable American expansion, one that is ethically suspect to say the least. I use “contact zone” *here* to highlight the inter- and intra-culturality of these spaces. The histories of these spaces are far more complex, and terms such as the “contact zone” or Gloria Anzaldúa’s “borderlands,” allow a more capacious understanding their complexities.

CHAPTER TWO

¹ In instances in which I attempt to imitate how poems would have looked in their letter forms to Susan, I use the ordering of poems and typographical style of Smith and Hart’s *Open Me Carefully*. In instances in which I reproduce poems *not* sent to Susan, I use R. W. Franklin’s order of poems and typographical style in his *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Variorum Edition*. Though there remains some debate, by now it is generally accepted among Dickinson scholars

that the accuracy of Franklin's edition supersedes Thomas H. Johnson's important, though more edited, *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*.

² Erkkila cites Faderman, Mudge, Oberhaus, and Smith as critics who romanticize Dickinson and Sue's relationship. She notes that, in *The Anxiety of Gender*, Vivian Pollak attends to "the more negative, guilt-ridden homosexual dimension of Dickinson's love relationships with women, especially Sue Gilbert" ("Homoeroticism and Audience" 178 n7).

³ My understanding of Dickinson's treatment of the discourses of domesticity has been influenced by three important studies in particular: Lora Romero's *Home Fronts: Domesticity and Its Critics in the Antebellum United States* (1997); Thomas Foster's *Transformations of Domesticity in Modern Women's Writing: Homelessness at Home* (2002); and Amy Kaplan's *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (2002). In their own ways, each of these texts is invested in destabilizing the (highly gendered) public/private binary in treatments of domesticity. Each is also invested in analyzing the "domestic sphere" as a site of conflicting, unstable social and ideological meanings, neither inherently radical nor inherently conservative.

⁴ It is worth noting that Dickinson—and her and Susan's relationship—occupy a prominent space in Coviello's archive of nineteenth-century American authors who "worried over the encroachment of a new regime of sexual specification, and so placed a countervailing emphasis on the erotic as a mode of being not yet encoded in the official vocabularies of the intimate" (*Tomorrow's Parties* 4). See the coda to his chapter, "Whitman At War," entitled, "A Little Destiny," where he argues that, throughout Dickinson and Susan's letter exchange, the primary question that weaves the letters together is: "*Where might we love each other? Where can two women love one another? Where can two nineteenth-century American women be present to one another in the full breadth of their devotion, their need, and their ardor?*" (67).

⁵ I emphasize the biopolitical, which is in relation to but distinct from the political, because it provides a rich analytic vocabulary for thinking through the relationship between individuals, populations, and States (in this case, obviously, the post-bellum U.S. nation-state) in terms of sexuality, reproduction, and desire. My understanding of this relationship is deeply informed by theorists of biopolitics, namely Foucault and Agamben, even as I depart from them significantly in some regards.

⁶ Grounded firmly in affect theory, scholars of “public feelings” have been invested in how (supposedly private) feelings might do political work, and inversely, how feelings are always already saturated with the political. De-privatizing the supposedly unitary liberal subject, these scholars ask what communities and solidarities might be formed by an attention to shared affects, as well as they ask what different kinds of analytics that attention to public feelings might open up. Ann Cvetcovich’s *An Archive of Feelings* and *Depression: A Public Feeling*, have been crucial for the development of this scholarship. Lauren Berlant’s *Cruel Optimism*, as well as José Muñoz’s *Cruising Utopia*, in quite different ways, have also taken up this line of inquiry.

⁷ Queer of color critique, queer Native studies, and feminist studies have been at the forefront of critiquing Foucault and Agamben’s disembodied, universalized notions of sovereignty. See in particular Weheliye; Rifkin; Ziarek; Deutscher; Parvulescu.

⁸ Abstaining from reading Dickinson’s Latin Americanism as only a mirror of imperialist discourses, I am influenced by Eve Sedgwick’s methodology of “reparative reading.” “To read from a reparative position,” she writes, “is to surrender the knowing, anxious paranoid determination that no horror, however apparently unthinkable, shall ever come to the reader *as new*; to a reparatively positioned reader, it can seem realistic and necessary to experience surprise. Because there can be terrible surprises, however, there can also be good ones. Hope,

often a fracturing, even a traumatic thing to experience, is among the energies by which the reparatively positioned reader tries to organize the fragments and part-objects she encounters or creates” (*Touching Feeling* 146). This kind of reading practice, I contend, might offer new insights into the ways in which literary studies might speak to, critique, or complicate theories of biopolitics, mired as they so often are in “paranoid” reading practices.

⁹ To include an entire list of important works by theorists concerned with the concept of sovereignty would be improbable if not impossible. But a helpful list of texts both classic and more recent can be found on the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* website’s entry, “Sovereignty.”

¹⁰ See in particular Agamben’s *Homo Sacer* (1998) and *State of Exception* (2004).

¹¹ See, for example, Weheliye; Ziarek; Deutscher; Morgenson; Rifkin; Parvulescu.

¹² By invoking Georges Bataille, I refer to his important work, *The Accursed Share*, particularly volumes two and three: *The History of Eroticism and Sovereignty*. Here he radically transforms the concept of sovereignty as a state or feeling of a radical disintegration of any unitary self. He also importantly links his notion of sovereignty to the erotic. This reformulation has been important to my understanding of the multiplicity, as well as the affective registers, of sovereignties toward which Dickinson seems to gesture—even as she holds firmly to a fantasy of absolute power (which ultimately eludes her).

¹³ I’m of course referring to Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s monumental work of feminist literary criticism, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979).

¹⁴ For a classic study of gender and domesticity, and the discourse of “public” and “private” spheres, see Barbara Welter’s “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860.” For early field-

defining debates regarding the politics of domesticity in nineteenth-century U.S. women's literature, see Douglas and Tompkins. See also Romero, Forster, and Kaplan, as well as Brown, Jones, and Wexler.

¹⁵ Some of the most important feminist scholars to have taken up the theme of Dickinson's female erotic friendships have been Patterson; Rich; Faderman; Pollak, *Anxiety*; Bennett, *My Life a Loaded Gun* and *Emily Dickinson: Woman Poet*; Smith; and Erkkila, "Homoeroticism."

¹⁶ By linking the notion of "possessiveness" to sovereignty, I am alluding to George Lipsitz's notion of "a possessive investment in whiteness," a phrase which links whiteness and racializing epistemologies to economic formations of capitalism and their attendant rhetorics of (universalized) individualism. I am suggesting that, for Dickinson, while her desire for (homo)erotic sovereignty is highly inflected with economic language, it gestures less toward capitalist individualism than toward mutual—if often withheld—exchange.

¹⁷ Observing both Joseph Duchac's *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: An Annotated Guide to Commentary Published in English, 1890-1977* (1979) and his later *Annotated Guide* (1993) which surveys commentary published from 1978-1989, one may note a slight shift in critical emphasis. Some of the earliest criticism Duchac samples indeed focuses on the themes of death in the poem, while later critics tend to read it as a meditation on home.

¹⁸ See the online Emily Dickinson Lexicon.

¹⁹ I am thinking here of Foucault's model of power, which he develops first in *Discipline and Punish* (1977) and extends into the realm of sexuality in his later work.

²⁰ See, for example, Sandra Runzo's essay, "Dickinson's Transgressive Body," where she reads Dickinson in a Butlerian mode and argues that, in Dickinson, "status as Queen designates

power, primacy, authority, honor—all qualities that might be perceived as more ‘masculine’ than ‘feminine’ in nineteenth-century America” (67).

²¹ See Erkkila, “Dickinson and Class” and “Dickinson and the Art of Politics”; and Mitchell, *Emily Dickinson: Monarch of Perception*.

²² Pollak’s *Anxiety of Gender* and Erkkila’s “Homoeroticism and Audience” are two such examples. While I have not come across enough evidence to agree with this conclusion wholeheartedly, there is certainly enough to claim that the poem’s concerns about the loss of an erotic female friendship through heterosexual marriage do indeed resonate with many similar concerns in the poetry that was addressed directly to Susan.

²³ Dickinson was remarkably familiar with law and legal discourse, as James R. Guthrie’s recent *A Kiss from Thermopylae: Emily Dickinson and Law* (2015) has demonstrated. See in particular his fabulous chapter on Dickinson and legal contracts, “Seals, Signs, and Rings: Contracts,” where he explores Dickinson’s treatment of marriage contracts specifically in her poetry (71-88).

²⁴ For excellent studies on the import of the U.S.-Mexican War in nineteenth-century U.S. culture, see Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas: The Mexican War in the American Imagination* (1988) and Streeby, *American Sensations: Class, Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture* (2002). Both contend that the cultural and political impact of the U.S.-Mexican War has been underestimated in U.S.-based Americanist scholarship, and Streeby in particular notes the ways that it shaped discourses of race, class, and the urban/rural divide.

²⁵ While this letter has been taken up in Dickinson scholarship to indicate her level of awareness (or lack thereof) in political matters, I have yet to find it in the context of Dickinson’s

treatment of domesticity. Perhaps more strongly than any other, this letter suggests that she indeed links concerns with the home to concerns with the nation (as well as national region).

²⁶ It is worth noting the ways in which Edenic discourses played a role in the justification of U.S. imperialism—particularly with respect to the rhetoric of Manifest Destiny and westward expansion. Much of the early canonical nineteenth-century American scholarship engages this theme, perhaps most notably Henry Nash Smith’s 1950 *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* and R.W.B. Lewis’s 1955 *The American Adam*; but also the work of Leslie Fiedler, Roderick Nash, and Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration* and *Fatal Environment*. For early feminist treatments of this theme, see Annette Kolodny, *Lay of the Land* and *Land Before Her*.

²⁷ According to Prescott’s biographer, C. Harvey Gardiner, in just five months, Prescott’s American publishers (Harpers) “had sold 5,000 copies; and in England, where Bentley’s 2,500-copy edition was triple the size of the average English edition of an historical work, the success was likewise spectacular” (272). By 1969, it had been published in “11 languages, more than 160 times” (269).

²⁸ In *Emily Dickinson’s Imagery*, Rebecca Patterson traces the significance of over twenty references to Latin America in Dickinson’s poems and letters: twenty-three in total. I have identified three more, poems 452, 1162, and 1630, making the total of Dickinson’s Latin American references at least twenty-six.

²⁹ Some of the most influential texts that have theorized the eroticization of the “exotic” in colonial literature and politics are, of course, Said and Fanon. More recently, Stoler has put Foucauldian biopolitics to productive use in analyzing this phenomenon in *Race and the Education of Desire*.

³⁰ The letter in which “Reverse cannot befall” was sent to Susan has been lost; this is its published variant. Franklin dates this poem to 1863.

³¹ I am grateful for Vivian Pollak’s observation, in a recent conversation, that “Your Riches taught me – Poverty” appears not only in a personal letter to Susan, but also in Fascicle 14 (sometimes referred to as the “June Bee Book”). She suggested that this fascicle represents—in Dickinson’s typically elliptical fashion—a series of meditations on desire and pleasure’s constant deferral. I find this reading highly persuasive, and it aligns with my reading of this particular poem.

CHAPTER THREE

¹ This poem, entitled “To You,” was originally published in the “Messenger Leaves” poem-cluster in the 1860 edition of *Leaves of Grass*.

² Stoddard was one among many men who wrote “avowal” letters (Whitman’s term) to the elder poet that specifically addressed male same-sex eroticism and its presence in the “Calamus” sequence in particular. For accounts of such letters, see Schmidgall, and especially “Annex: Walt & Oscar: Voices of Liberation,” 283-387. See also Michael Robertson’s account, in *Worshipping Walt*, of “a small coterie of loosely affiliated male disciples [who] had come to regard [Walt Whitman] as the modern era’s great prophet of same-sex passion” in the late nineteenth century (143).

³ Stoddard explicitly references each of these authors in *South-Sea Idyls* with the exception of David Porter. In *The South Seas: A Reception History from Daniel Defoe to Dorothy Lamour*, Brawley and Dixon note Porter’s special significance in Stoddard’s early imagination of the South Pacific (45).

⁴ Howells's endorsement appears in the introductory letter for the 1892 reissue of Stoddard's 1873 *South-Sea Idyls*.

⁵ In "Kane-Aloha," another sketch about a white American male traveler's erotic relationship with a Hawaiian boy, published in *Island of Tranquil Delights*, the narrator begins, without mincing words, "God made me!" (255).

⁶ J. Jack Halberstam describes those recovery projects as "positivist projects committed to restoring the gay subject to history and redeeming the gay self from its pathologization" (*Queer Art of Failure* 147-48). In the exchange with which this chapter begins, Stoddard makes a notable appearance in Jonathan Ned Katz's monumental *Gay American History*. He would return in Katz's other important work, *Love Stories: Sex Between Men Before Homosexuality*.

⁷ Stoddard's other works, which go undiscussed in this chapter, include: *Mashallah! A Flight into Egypt* (1881); *Cruising the South Sea*; *Lepers of Molokai* (1885); *A Troubled Heart and How it Was Comforted at Last* (1890); *Hawaiian Life, Being Lazy Letters from Low Latitudes* (1894); *Saint Anthony: The Wonder Worker of Padua* (1896); *A Cruise Under the Crescent* (1898); *Over the Rocky Mountains to Alaska* (1899); *Father Damien, the Martyr of Molokai* (1901); *In the Footprints of the Padres* (1902); and *Exits and Entrances* (1903). One may note the heavy influence of Catholicism in these works. For work that incorporates this element of Stoddard's life and work into queer scholarship, see Gregory Tomso, "The Queer History of Leprosy and Same-Sex Love."

⁸ With the exception of Stoddard biographer Roger Austen, few critics have been interested in tracking changes across his career. Usually, they focus on *South-Sea Idyls*; far less often, *For the Pleasure of His Company* is addressed, if usually dismissively. I have yet to find any criticism that engages his poetry with any seriousness. This critical void misses some of the

generative insights about the history of sexuality and U.S. imperialism that a full-scale consideration can address. Since Austen is the only other critic who has done so, it is worth stating where we depart. For Austen, Stoddard was a gay man, in the twentieth-century understanding of that term, and he is interested in the explanatory power of that term, seeing Stoddard negotiating—and sometimes rebelling against—a homophobic society from the outset. As I see it, his early work evinces a relative lack of ambivalence or anxiety about male-male intimacy, whereas ambivalence and anxiety are perhaps the defining features of his late work in *For the Pleasure of His Company*.

⁹ By “contraction,” I mean that homes begin as spaces of free movement and consumption in Stoddard’s early works, and end as spaces of isolation, loneliness, and a never-quite-satisfying retreat from his protagonist’s social world. By “de-naturalization” I am punning on the commonplace critical move to question the inherence of one’s object of study. I mean something different, something more literal, here. In his early work, the home is not as one might expect, the ultimate site of civilized modernity; rather, it is for Stoddard the key meeting point between the modern and the primitive. Over time, however, souvenirs are all that remain of “the natural.”

¹⁰ It has even been suggested (though this is not entirely verifiable) that Melville’s first two novels, *Typee* and *Omoo*, first inspired Stoddard to travel to the South Pacific. Stoddard explicitly references both novels in *South-Sea Idyls*.

¹¹ Melville was not alone in his appraisal. According to biographer Roger Austen, “Tennyson ‘liked’ the verses; Longfellow found ‘a deal of beauty and freshness’; Emerson judged them ‘good and interesting’; while Fr. John Henry Newman thought them ‘elegant and touching’” (33). Austen notes that each of these responses is quoted in a draft of an unpublished

biography, "Confessions of a Reformed Poet," held in the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley (178 n11).

¹² An exhaustive list of scholars who have studied homoeroticism in Melville's oeuvre would be too long for the space allowed here, but some notable works include Robert K. Martin, *Hero, Captain, and Stranger: Male Friendship, Social Critique, and Literary Form in the Sea Novels of Herman Melville*; Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel*; Leo Bersani, "Incomparable America" in *The Culture of Redemption*; Caleb Crain, "Lovers of Human Flesh: Homosexuality and Cannibalism in Melville's Novels"; and Eve Sedgwick, "Billy Budd: After the Homosexual" in *Epistemology of the Closet*. For analysis of Melville (specifically, his novel *Pierre*) in queer native studies, see Mark Rifkin, *Settler Common Sense*. In *Gay New York*, George Chauncey writes that "it seems likely that *Omoos*, *Typee*, and some of Melville's other stories of the South Pacific were...widely regarded by gay men as ethnographies of homosexuality" in the early twentieth century (284). Jordan Alexander Stein notes that "the editions of Melville's early novels *Typee* and *Omoos* that his widow brought back into print in 1893 were passed from hand to hand in some of New York's nascent homosexual communities" ("History's Dick Jokes").

¹³ In this argument I draw on Sara Ahmed's work in *Queer Phenomenology* where she describes the "invisible" centrality of white subjectivity as racial and geographic center, characterized by "the desire to possess, and to occupy" (Ahmed 15). As she writes later in that work, "The alignment of race and space is crucial to how they materialize as givens, as if each 'extends' the other. In other words, while 'the other side of the world' is associated with 'racial otherness,' racial others become associated with the 'other side of the world.' They come to *embody distance*. This embodiment of distance is what makes whiteness 'proximate,' as the

‘starting point’ for orientation. Whiteness becomes what is ‘here,’ a line from which the world unfolds, which also makes what is ‘there’ on ‘the other side’” (121).

¹⁴ By suggesting such associations, I am evoking Cheryl Harris’s theorization of “whiteness as property,” as well as Wahneema Lubiano’s profoundly suggestive book title, *The House that Race Built*.

¹⁵ For a history of ante- and post-bellum slavery in the South Pacific, and its relation to U.S. slavery and the Civil War, see Gerald Horne, *The White Pacific*.

¹⁶ Lim’s *Brown Boys and Rice Queens* focuses on white man/native boy dyad in South Asia, but this dyad functions in similar ways in the South Pacific context as well. This is not to conflate the different histories of colonialism in these contexts, but to suggest similarities in the representation and eroticization of indigenous males in the “Pacific.” Hiram Pérez has argued for “brownness” as an analytic category because “the link...between ‘brownness’ as a simultaneously abject and idyllic primitive condition and ‘brown’ as racial vernacular...should immediately suggest symbolic origins for all racial difference signified by color...This seems obvious enough, yet our tendency to intellectually underestimate the cruder aspects of racialization functions only to screen their monumental influence at the levels of both individual consciousness and a popular imaginary” (14). For example, recall Stoddard’s (and countless other colonials’) frequent conflation of Pacific islands with “the Orient.”

¹⁷ In the Oxford English Dictionary, the primary definition of “intercourse” is “communication to and fro between countries, etc.; mutual dealings between the inhabitants of different localities.” It may also mean “social communication between individuals” as well as “sexual connection.”

¹⁸ In 1874 a British edition of *South-Sea Idyls* was published, with the title *Summer Cruising in the South Seas*. This included several new illustrations, which scandalized some readers due to their depictions of, in Austen's words, "many more naked maidens than actually appear in the 'harmless' tales" (68). Evidently, it was female nudity rather than male homoeroticism that offended. William Dean Howells was one such reader, writing in his introductory letter to the 1892 re-issue of *South-Sea Idyls*, "Your London publisher defamed your delicate and charming text with illustrations so vulgar and repulsive that I do not think anyone could have looked twice inside the abominable cover" (qtd. in Austen 68).

¹⁹ Michel Foucault's distinction between "utopia" and "heterotopia," employed by Ralph J. Poole in his analysis of Stoddard's *South-Sea Idyls*, may be useful here. Quoting Foucault, Poole writes that "utopias are 'sites with no real place,' i.e., unreal spaces 'that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of Society.' Heterotopias, on the other hand, are real places that do exist functioning 'something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia,' places 'outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality'" (84). Poole is uncritical of Foucault's colonialist assumptions here, in which non-Western space is figured as the inevitable "outside of all places"; still, the distinction is useful insofar as it distinguishes between utopias as projected fantasies and heterotopias in which fantasy is imbued with "heterotopic forces and desires" grounded in "real" experience (84). Foucault even explicitly relates heterotopias to settler colonialism: "...I wonder if certain colonies have not functioned somewhat in this manner...I am thinking, for example, of the first wave of colonization in the seventeenth century, of the Puritan societies that the English had founded in America and that were absolutely perfect other places. I am also thinking of those extraordinary Jesuit colonies in which human perfection was effectively achieved" (8).

²⁰ Coviello's recent work on Mormonism in the nineteenth century suggests that Mormons were frequently understood in racialized terms of sexual excessiveness and non-whiteness, both terms of which Stoddard suggestively alludes here. "How the Mormons Became White: Scripture, Sex, Sovereignty." Lecture. Washington University in St. Louis. March 18, 2015.

²¹ Mourning the passing of Kaná-aná and his people, as well as their "primitive" culture, Stoddard's narrator participates in what Renato Rosaldo has described as "imperialist nostalgia," "where people mourn the passing of what they themselves have transformed" (69).

²² For a succinct account of Stoddard's biography—though one that studiously obscures his sexual attraction to, relations with, and representations of men—see McGinty.

²³ In a not entirely dismissive assessment, James Gifford writes, "*For the Pleasure of His Company* barely holds a plot: it is casual (if that is the word), without the tight construction or orderliness that characterizes *South-Sea Idyls*" (126).

²⁴ Halberstam's *In a Queer Time and Place* defines these life scripts—scripts that arguably emerged under the conditions of nineteenth-century capitalism—as "family time" or "reproductive time": the naturalized temporal arrangement of life organized around the reproduction of the bourgeois family (4-5). Muñoz, drawing on Halberstam's work, calls this temporal arrangement "straight time." In *No Future*, Edelman famously names it "reproductive futurism."

²⁵ Canonical works produced in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century by Oscar Wilde and Marcel Proust, like *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Cities of the Plain*, respectively, might be considered exemplary of this tradition. Much of the early important work of gay and lesbian criticism was devoted to unearthing the "homosexual secrets" beneath such codes.

²⁶ In her field-defining *Epistemology of the Closet*, Eve Sedgwick famously “proposes that many of the major nodes of thought and knowledge in twentieth-century Western culture as a whole are structured—indeed, fractured—by a chronic, now endemic crisis of homo/heterosexual definition, indicatively male, dating from the end of the nineteenth century” (1). The claustrophobia and stasis that the novel affects, I argue, make those felt relations palpable even as those feelings tend to exceed linguistic referents or logical explanations. Importantly, the queer theoretical paradigm of the closet has been critiqued on a number of grounds, particularly in its seeming erasure of race as a social category. See, for example, Marlon B. Ross’s “Beyond the Closet as Raceless Paradigm.” Siobhan Somerville and Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman historicize “the closet’s” emergence out of a nineteenth-century racialized discourse of perversity that was believed to be visible, and thus knowable, on the body racialized as “not white.” Without explicitly engaging this terminology, Ann Laura Stoler’s work can be said to suggest that “the closet” arises out of colonial conditions as well, as an important marker of distinction between white bourgeois settler “normalcy” and indigenous “perversity.”

²⁷ Looby writes, “[Just] as the novel is averse to conventional forms of erotic and affectional partnership (permanent heterosexual coupledness, and so on), it eschews conventional plotting that would tend to produce a recognizable romance of the usual kind” (850).

²⁸ With “radical queer refusal” I mean to evoke Lee Edelman’s provocative polemic *No Future*, in which he proposes a radical “queer oppositionality that would oppose itself to the structural determinants of politics as such,” because “politics,” argues Edelman, are always necessarily structured by the reproductive futurism against which the “queer” positions itself. In this way, the queer “would oppose itself to the logic of opposition. This paradoxical formulation suggests a refusal—the appropriately perverse refusal that characterizes queer theory—of every

substantialization of identity, which is always oppositionally defined, and, by extension, of history as linear narrative (the poor man's teleology) in which meaning succeeds in revealing itself—*as itself*—through time" (4). What is more interesting to me in this novel than any "refusal of the social" or refusal of linearity it might enact, is Clitheroe's oscillation between and non-prioritization of "normative" and "non-normative" desires and his general failure to satisfy either of them.

²⁹ According to Roger Austen, Stoddard "admired *The Portrait of a Lady* when he read it in Hawaii." As "the two writers had many other friends in common," Stoddard wanted to meet James during his travels in Europe, though this did not occur (120). They would, however, meet in 1905 when James traveled to San Francisco for a dinner put on by the Bohemian Club in which both authors were honored. Interestingly, as Natasha Hurley has noted, it seems as though it was Stoddard and not James whose presence was the highlight of the event (one that included the likes of Enrico Caruso, among others) (95).

³⁰ Departing from criticism that focuses on homoeroticism in Stoddard's work, Adam Stauffer critiques that small of body of work for "[tending] to ignore the context in which works like *South-Sea Idyls* were produced." Instead, he reads Stoddard in the context of "the expansion of global consumption and the creation of a cosmopolitan ethos that navigated in and through the structure of imperialism" (211). Dispensing with the issue of sexuality in Stoddard's work, however, Stauffer ignores the possibility that the writer's "cosmopolitan ethos" was deeply attached to his erotic desires, his racial primitivism, and his complicated disidentification with both U.S. capitalism and the U.S. state more generally.

³¹ On the "Friendship tradition," see Michael Lynch's classic essay, "'Here is Adhesiveness': From Friendship to Homosexuality." "At the beginning of the [nineteenth]

century,” he writes, “the only discourse for same-sex passionate relationships, outside those of sin or crime, was the Friendship tradition. A moral discourse, its reference was not exclusively same-sex. Friendship could exist between men and women as well as between women and women, or men and men” (68). Lynch traces how, across the nineteenth century, this moral discourse shifted with the emergence of phrenology and, by the end of the century, sexology.

CHAPTER FOUR

¹ Cather’s Paul and Stoddard’s, with their respective emphases on surface and illegibility and finally the seeming impossibility for their narratives to imagine a possible future for them, it should be noted, bear striking similarities beyond their first names.

² See Butler, “‘Dangerous Crossing’: Willa Cather’s Masculine Names,” pp. 142-166; and Sedgwick, “Across Gender, Across Sexuality: Willa Cather and Others,” pp. 167-176.

³ An earlier iteration of this line of thinking can be found in Nealon’s 1997 essay, “Affect-Genealogy: Feeling and Affiliation in Willa Cather.”

⁴ Herring is drawing on George Chauncey’s account of early twentieth-century lesbian subcultures in Greenwich Village in *Gay New York*, pp. 228-34.

⁵ Recall Michael Lynch’s essay “‘Here is Adhesiveness’: From Friendship to Homosexuality,” which places Whitman within shifting discourses of male sexuality from the nineteenth to the early twentieth century. Notable as well is the tradition of “feminine friendships,” in Cather’s own terms, within the nineteenth-century bourgeois “female world of love and ritual” historicized in Carroll Smith-Rosenberg’s classic essay of the same name. As both Heather Love and Kadji Amin have noted, “friendship,” following Foucault’s interview entitled “Friendship as a Way of Life” has occupied a privileged position within queer studies, as

a non-hetero-/homonormative mode of relation: “uninstitutionalized relations [that] generate reconfigured and antidisciplinary bodies, selves, and collectivities” (Amin 15). For different purposes, both Love and Amin challenge friendship’s idealization in Foucault’s interview and in queer theory more generally. Love proposes “a more complex and conflict-laden understanding of friendship,” “an alternative trajectory of queer friendship marked by impossibility, disconnection, and loss” (74-5). Amin, on the other hand, argues that in queer theory’s embrace of “Friendship as a Way of Life,” “it has forgotten that a central topic of this interview, and the blueprint for the uninstitutionalized relations Foucault has in mind, is *pederasty*, not the Ancient Greek kind, but that practiced contemporaneously by French men in the 1980s” (15).

⁶ Homestead’s work presents a productive methodological challenge to the negative strain of queer Cather criticism by emphasizing Cather’s letters. Still, by carefully detaching the biography from the fiction, I wonder if this too readily shuts down the imaginative erotic possibilities these novels offer that are no doubt in relation (however obliquely) to Cather’s lived experience and her socio-political milieu.

⁷ In this description I draw loosely from Deleuze and Guattari’s theories of “becoming-animal,” not to reify the racist belief that non-white bodies are “animalistic” but to highlight their historical co-implication in racist discourse. For Deleuze and Guattari, “becoming-animal” and its various other iterations are necessarily queer in that they “[undermine] the great molar powers of family, career, and conjugality” (233). Tellingly, they understand this process in terms of “expansion, propagation, occupation, contagion, peopling”; it is thus, at once, queer, reproductive, and expansionist (239). My term, “becoming-Native,” then, highlights the specific significance of indigenous peoples in Cather’s protagonists’ disintegration of individual subjectivity.

⁸ In making this claim, I draw on Amber Musser's work on "sensation." By contrast to "anti-social" queer theory's "history of reading for exceptionalism" which "[disavows] difference in its quest to decenter the subject," Musser proposes that it (and masochism in particular) might be read "not as a practice of exceptionalism or subversion but as an analytic space where difference is revealed" (19). Taking this provocation somewhat literally, I am interested in why these scenes of decentering in *The Song of the Lark* and *The Professor's House* seem to *centralize* Indianness.

⁹ Some of the major works in this line of thinking, some of which are in idiosyncratic relation to it, include Edelman, *No Future*; Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?" and *Homos*; Love, *Feeling Backward*; and Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*.

¹⁰ Following Sharon O'Brien's work, Pound is often regarded as the first significant love of Cather's life.

¹¹ For an authoritative, comprehensive account (though one that does not mention Cather) of the widespread "antimodernist" sentiment in the U.S. in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, see T. J. Jackson Lears's *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920*.

¹² She gives *O Pioneers!* this definition in her essay, aptly titled, "My First Novels [There Were Two]" in *On Writing*, pp. 89-98.

¹³ Describing temporal drag, Freeman offers the palpable example of "queer's" self-casting as the present and even the future of sexual radicalism and its casting of "lesbian feminism" as its outdated, exhausted, "motherly" past. She explores productively unproductive instances in which "lesbian feminism" emerges in the present to pull "queer" back into its past(s). I want to suggest that Cather's protagonists' persistent pull toward the past enacts a similar phenomenon,

calling into question modernity's very modernness as well as its purported superiority to the nineteenth century. For more on "temporal drag," see Freeman, pp. 59-93.

¹⁴ This aspect of Catherian primitivism cannot be over-emphasized, and many scholars have variously argued many of Cather's central works are preoccupied with questions of American empire. I distinguish what follows in this chapter from that scholarship in two key ways. First, this scholarship is concerned with the relative *absence* of Native Americans on Cather's frontier landscapes, whereas I am suggesting a relative *pervasiveness* of, if not living Native Americans, then ghostly ones. Second, as in my Whitman chapter, I investigate moments in which imperial discourse does not necessarily announce itself as such, scenes of intimacy and affective intensity that would seem on the surface merely examples of personal or interpersonal transformation. Why is the fictive idea of ghostly Indianness so central to these transformations? Some of the most important work on Cather and empire includes Fischer, Reynolds, Urgo, and Karush. For Fischer, Cather's work evinces an "imperialist nostalgia" for a frontier in which Indians do not seem to exist. Reynolds and Urgo devote entire monograph studies to the question of Cather and empire; and Karush's article about *The Professor's House*, perhaps more pointedly than Reynolds and Urgo, argues that Cather "domesticates" empire by invoking then obscuring it by situating it within a domestic novel. My difference in approach to these works is not intended as a critique but rather is intended to take these scholars' insights into unexplored terrain.

¹⁵ I say "overlapping" rather than "shared" temporalities because Mark Rifkin has recently argued "that asserting the shared modernity or presentness of Natives and non-natives implicitly casts Indigenous peoples as inhabiting the current movement and moving toward the future in ways that treat dominant non-native geographies, intellectual and political categories,

periodizations, and conceptions of causality as given—as the background against which to register and assess Native being-in-time” (*Beyond Settler Time* viii).

¹⁶ Nealon addresses primitivism as central to Cather’s protagonists’ “affect-genealogies” but sidesteps the question of how that primitivism participates in ongoing settler colonial ideologies.

¹⁷ When discussing her “anti-Freudianism,” critics frequently cite the following passage: “Imagine a young man, or woman, born in New York City, educated at a New York university, violently inoculated with Freud, hurried into journalism, knowing no more about New England country people (or country folk anywhere) than he has caught from motor trips or observed from summer hotels: what is there for him in *The Country of the Pointed Firs*?” (Not Under Forty, pp. 92-3). Praising Sarah Orne Jewett’s novel on the basis that it would seem to refuse the comprehension of a young urbanite, Cather offers another example of her preference for the past over the modern—the latter in which Freudian psychoanalysis is implied to stand as a metonymy.

¹⁸ Two recent examples include Kishi, ““More than Anything Else, I Like My Closets’: Willa Cather’s Melancholic Erotics in *The Professor’s House*” and Forter, *Gender, Race, and Mourning in American Modernism*, both of which engage a psychoanalytic reading of *The Professor’s House* that emphasizes mourning and melancholia. In Kishi’s account, an erotics of the closet offers Cather’s protagonists—and Cather herself—“a site of immense possibility for narcissistic pleasure, not of repression” (171). In this account, longing for and identification with Native Americans “epitomizes the novel’s economy of desire, wherein only the lost thing can be one’s object of desire” (166); in addition, St. Peter’s attachment to Augusta derives from their shared “sensitivity for death” (170). Similarly, Forter proposes that “What makes [Cather’s]

relationship to [the Indian] melancholic is less that it cannot be introjected than that her ambivalence leads her to insist that the Indian *must* be lost while encrypting him as an impossible ideal, at once too fragile to survive and too precious to be psychically relinquished” (142). Both accounts, to my mind, follow Cather’s lead in implicitly linking Indianness to a primitivism that is both an ideal state/sociality and one that is circumscribed to death and to the past.

¹⁹ Another critic interested in this aspect of the novel is Walter Benn Michaels, whose *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, Pluralism* (1995) places Cather—and *The Professor’s House* in particular—within an American modernist movement that “must be understood as deeply committed to the nativist project of racializing the American” (13). Through this lens, *The Professor’s House* emerges as one among many texts produced in the 1920s that sought to naturalize the link between national identity and racial difference. Queer critics have understandably been resistant to Michaels’s essentially structuralist argument, not least because one of his central contentions is that incest, homosexuality, and impotence all function as means for white racial preservation, full stop (12-13). Like Michaels, I am interested in connections *The Professor’s House* seems to draw between indigeneity and foreignness through the figures of “Mother Eve” and Augusta; unlike Michaels, I do not assume that queerness is in any way inherently linked to a eugenic project, in Cather’s text or in any other for that matter.

²⁰ This argument is indebted to Anca Parvulescu’s recent materialist feminist critique of Edelman’s theorization of queerness, which demonstrates how he works with “a narrow concept of reproduction as procreative heteronormativity tethered to heterosexual sex,” ignoring “our daily reproduction in the service of capitalism.” Contextualizing her argument within a framework of a transnational division of feminized labor, Parvulescu contends, “Marxist and materialist feminist theories of reproduction remind us that all of us, Edelman’s queer man

included, engage in reproductive work and behaviors” (89). By idealizing St. Peter’s resistance to modernity, queer Cather critics have tended to under examine both the racial fantasies and the material conditions that make possible that resistance.

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¹ On sexual violation as a method of dehumanization of colonized peoples—especially women—see Andrea Smith, “Not an Indian Tradition: The Sexual Colonization of Native Peoples.” Driskill also writes about sexual colonization from a Two-Spirit perspective in “Stolen From Our Bodies: First Nations Two-Spirits/Queers and the Journey to a Sovereign Erotic.”

² On genres of the human, see the work of Sylvia Wynter, especially “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—an Argument.” Alexander Weheliye draws on her work, as well as the work of Hortense Spillers, to critique theories of racialization within contemporary biopolitical discourse in his book *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*. Many of Spillers’s essays are collected in *Black, White, and In Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture*. For an early articulation of openness and “unpredictability” as a reading practice but one that extends beyond traditional notions of “reading,” see Eve Sedgwick’s essay, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You” in *Touching Feeling*, pp. 123-152.

³ For Halberstam’s take(down) on/of the recent *differences* special issue with that title, see “Straight Eye for the Queer Theorist—a Review of ‘Queer Theory without Antinormativity.’”

⁴ Invoking the “well wrought urn,” I am calling up the legacy of Cleanth Brooks, for many the representative “New Critic” who advocated a reading practice that treated texts—especially

lyric poetry—as organic wholes, timelessly isolated from social and historical conditions. His collection of essays, *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (1947), has been crucial for literary studies as an academic discipline. My wish here is not to treat him as a straw man, as is so often done, but rather to point to Driskill’s disidentificatory relation to the lyric-as-perfect-whole. Driskill offers an alternative reading practice. The twined legs and the river cane basket, containing within them geographies, topographies, and multiple temporal trajectories, explode the presumption of lyric timelessness; furthermore, Driskill’s river cane basket does, in this stanza, serve as a kind of urn—one that, however, refuses closure—for Native peoples who have died under U.S. settler colonialism.

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